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Article

The homeless grief - The loss of non-kin family: Middle-aged immigrant experience of disenfranchised grief over a friend's death in Western society

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Abstract
This article emerged from the intersection of deep personal loss—the death of my friend, Anette, whom I considered family—and the struggle to articulate my grief. By weaving autoethnographic elements of personal stories and reflections about Anette and my other friends with broader sociocultural contexts, this paper invites readers into the world of middle-aged immigrants, where loss and friendships intertwine in ways that are often hard to put into words. It sheds light on the significance of friendships and the marginalization of grief experienced by newcomers facing a friend's death in Western societies. The exploration integrates insights from the frameworks and concepts of acculturative stress of immigration, friendship, and disenfranchised grief. This convergence underscores the failure to recognize such losses as akin to familial bereavement and highlights the unique context of disenfranchised grief among immigrants. Considering the unstudied junction between the global phenomenon of relocation, the universally recognized ties of friendship, and the shared experience of death and grief, its importance and relevance are indisputable. This article offers a novel perspective and aims to enhance academic and societal awareness of this distinctive convergence of human experiences. It addresses a gap in the scholarly conversation and emphasizes the necessity of including immigrant realities and voices in developing intervention strategies and policies in local and international social, health, immigration, and other arenas.

Keywords
disenfranchised grief, immigration, friendship, death, autoethnography

Résumé
Cet article est inspiré par le croisement de deux événements : la mort de mon amie Anette, que je considérais comme de la famille, et la difficulté à exprimer mon deuil. En utilisant des éléments autoethnographiques, tels que des récits personnels et des réflexions, cet article propose une immersion dans l'univers des amitiés parmi les immigrants et immigrantes d'âge moyen dans un contexte socioculturel. Il met en lumière l'importance des amitiés et l'exclusion du deuil vécu par

les nouveaux arrivants et arrivantes confrontés au décès d'un ami ou d'une amie dans les sociétés occidentales. Ce travail intègre des perspectives liées aux concepts du stress acculturatif causé par l'immigration, de l'amitié et du deuil non reconnu. Il souligne l'incapacité à considérer ces pertes comme équivalentes à celles d'un deuil familial, et éclaire le contexte particulier du deuil non reconnu chez les immigrants et immigrantes. En examinant les liens entre la migration, l'amitié et l'expérience commune de la mort et du deuil, l'importance et la pertinence de cet article sont indéniables. Cet article offre une perspective authentique et vise à accroître la sensibilisation académique et sociétale à cette convergence unique d'expériences humaines. Il comble une lacune dans le débat académique et souligne la nécessité d'intégrer les réalités et les voix des immigrants et immigrantes dans l'élaboration de stratégies d'intervention et de politiques dans les domaines social, de la santé et de l'immigration.

Mots clés
deuil non reconnu, immigration, amitié, décès, authoethnographie

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> April 2020 (My friend Anette calls me from her trip back home)
> "Did you see my message? You must listen to this piece. It is exactly about us. I was shocked when I heard it, you will love it. I sent you a link," Anette sounded very emotional. Through her voice, I could feel her smiling eyes and hear her excitement through her so familiar shortness of breath. Annette called me on WhatsApp since she went to visit her family back home. Usually, she texted me during her trip due to the 7-hour time difference, but this time she called, and I knew it was important. I couldn't wait and quickly opened her message. It was a new song by singer Keren Peles titled "You Suddenly Came to Me." The music video depicted two middle-aged women engrossed in their busy lives, frequently finding themselves in the same places at the same time but never actually meeting —until one day, they did. It was our story in three minutes. We met by chance in the middle of our lives as fresh immigrants, and it was a life-changing experience. This song brought a new acknowledgment into our friendship, we both felt that something like our mid-life fateful encounter existed and was noticed somewhere else:
>
> It was almost the dusk hour of my life,
> but then you suddenly came to me.
> You suddenly came to me and told me:
> Come, God is saving a place at the end of the day
> For women like you and a naive like me (Scribd, n.d.).

Introduction

As a middle-aged immigrant in a Western country and a social worker deeply engaged in work with newcomers, community advocacy, and academic research, I believe this topic is profoundly important from individual, professional, and scholarly viewpoints. My personal experience at the intersection of multiple identities, as a newcomer, parent, friend, and griever, offers a unique perspective on diverse and inclusive grief experiences. Grounded in lived experience and viewed through a social work prism, advocating for social justice is crucial. It necessitates pushing for practice and policy reforms that amplify the voices of underrepresented and often overlooked grieving immigrants (Poole & Galvan, 2021). My scholarly commitment centers on deepening the theoretical understanding of both local and global perspectives on the intersection of immigration, friendship, and grief. This work aims to promote knowledge sharing, advance recognition, and pursue social equity and inclusive justice within this unexplored field.

Immigrant friendships often serve as lifelines in maneuvering the complexities of a new cultural and social landscape, providing essential and irreplaceable support. My journey of being a newcomer in Canada was profoundly shaped by the presence of close friends, who were a source of unwavering help, providing a sense of stability and belonging in the turbulent immigration period.

To grasp the potential reach of the intersection between immigration and friendship, it's important to note that international migrants make up an estimated 3.6 percent of the global population. In other words, one in 30 people does not live in a country where they were born (World Migration Report, WMR, 2022). Given both the numbers and the potential commonality of experiences at the convergence of immigration, friendship, and grief, it is surprising that the death of a friend, particularly in a migratory context where extended family is less accessible, has not been theorized or thoroughly explored.

Middle-aged individuals in general, and immigrants in particular, can face complex social roles and distinctive stressors (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Lozano et al., 2024; Rosemberg et al., 2022) that are also characterized by dual tasks of work and caregiving. Without a family of origin nearby or in close proximity, supportive friendships become essential to survival. Ackerman et al. (2007) examined the question of whether friendship can be a substitute for family. They found that relationships with friends may mimic kinship, and close friendships can develop dynamics that are typically associated with family ties. The researchers explain that if a close friend passes away, the death can be perceived as akin to losing a relative; therefore, the grief process can be like grieving the death of a family member.

Western society is described by Wood and Williamson (2003) as one that is based on capitalism and driven by a death-denying mindset. This structure establishes the framework for how bereaved individuals are perceived, sets the standards for mourning after a loss, and defines socially accepted forms of grieving and responses to death and loss (Harris, 2009). Grief that an individual experiences because of a loss that cannot be socially acknowledged and publicly mourned is defined as disenfranchised grief (Cesur-Soysal & Ari, 2024; Doka, 1989, 1999; Hall,

2014) which includes mourning the death of a close friend (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019). Although a friend's death is a worldwide human experience, modern Western society often fails to recognize the importance of this type of grief, since on the grief hierarchy, friends occupy a lower position and are seen as less grief-worthy than relatives (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019; Robson & Walter, 2013).

To enrich this narrative and engage readers, I have woven in autoethnographic elements, sharing my experiences, reflections, and memories that arose as I explored the subject. In the first two sections, I review the acculturative stress of the immigration framework and the above perspective on friendship as conceptual lenses for understanding the significance of friendship among middle-aged immigrants in modern society. In conjunction, these perspectives help elucidate how close friends, who essentially act as a family, can buffer against the stress of immigration and why the loss of such a meaningful relationship can be so significant. The next sections focus on the loss of a friend and the disenfranchised grief framework. This multi-layered complexity emphasizes the deep sorrow of enduring a loss comparable to that of a family member. Being unable to fully honor their grief and find comfort in a meaningful process adds an unrecognized and unvalidated layer of profound pain. Clinical and practical implications are discussed in the final section. Acknowledging bereaved friends can be used globally to inform social, immigration, health, and other fields to support this unique group, recognizing the potential short and long-term impact of the death of a friend (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019).

Amid the global surge in relocations and considering that immigrants constitute the majority of the population in some Western countries, this article presents a novel and invaluable perspective on the grief experienced by newcomers when a friend passes away. Highlighting the failure to recognize the loss as akin to losing family, and franchise this distinct form of grief, this paper can make a significant theoretical and practical multidisciplinary contribution in an international arena.

Acculturative stress of immigration or being a stranger

November 2023 (Reflection on Epistemology course reading, PhD in Social Work):

> I was reading Sara Ahmed's book, Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality, where she was talking about the recognition of a stranger as a "body out of place" (2000, p. 55). Upon reflection, I caught myself thinking that this body placement took me to a different sphere of being a newcomer - being a stranger and out of your place physically, emotionally, psychologically, and culturally. It is hard to be a stranger much of the time; however, you can get used to this experience without noticing it consciously. It becomes a part of your identity and at some point, it can become you…

Acculturation is described as a process where individuals or groups that belong to one culture adopt the values and practices of another culture while maintaining their own identity (Cole,

2024). The researcher explains that this process is often seen in the context of immigration, where minority cultures adopt aspects of the hosting majority group. The emotional experience of an immigrant can be compared to that of an adopted child living alongside the biological children of their adoptive parents, where an underlying shadow of doubt may linger about being fully accepted by the new family, symbolizing the host country (Akhtar, 2009).

Acculturative stress refers to the stress caused by navigating life events that stem from the acculturation process of adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2006; Driscoll & Torres, 2022; Soufi Amlashi et al., 2024). Driscoll and Torres (2022) explain that "dimensions of acculturation correspond to the extent to which individuals endorse behaviors, practices, identifications, and values of their heritage culture and those of the receiving culture" (p. 249) and it occurs both on a personal level and within groups. Modarressi (1992) noted that most immigrants, irrespective of the reasons behind their displacement, have lived as cultural refugees their entire lives.

September 2022 (My friend Micaela shared with me her helplessness and despair):

> The metaphor of being a cultural refugee reminds me of a friend who used to say, from time to time, that she was smarter in her native language, even though she spent over 25 years in a new country. Considering that language is one of the central aspects of the acculturation struggle, I deeply resonate with the persistent fear that you may never be able to express yourself or communicate authentically in a new place.

Research on acculturation outcomes has focused on identifying factors that may either exacerbate or alleviate acculturative stress. Positive factors found to contribute to reducing stress are the degree to which the new culture welcomes and encourages adaptation (Driscoll & Torres, 2022), longer duration of stay in a new country, as well as newcomers' cultural understanding, language skills, and social support (Soufi Amlashi et al., 2024). Driscoll and Torres (2022) assert that the experience of greater acculturative stress can be associated with pressure to acculturate to the new culture and/or pressure to resist the process. Soufi Amlashi and colleagues (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 26 studies published from 2004 to 2020 that explored the relationship between acculturative stress and psychological outcomes in international students. The review showed that stress may lead to an increase in depression, anxiety, psychological distress, psychosomatic disorders, and a decrease in psychological adjustment. The researchers shared that acculturative stress was negatively related to life quality, resilience, career expectations, sense of coherence, and health-enhancing behavior, and it could predict alcohol abuse and premenstrual stress.

January 2024 (Personal reflections on the feeling of friendship as an emotional space and a state):

> You can leave the stranger state of being outside your native place if you step into what I call the "SureZone", a space of cultural, emotional, and social comfort, where all your related insecurities and fears can lower their guard. One of the

> examples of such a zone can be a trusted friendship. This is a fulfilling experience, where one can take a break from the constant overpowering alert state. The examples of such a vigilant state can be as simple as small talk, or as significant as an emergency. Small talk as something casual and natural can become a frequent challenge for immigrants. My newcomer friend Tamara, when she was on her way to work, was standing outside of her workplace waiting until the last minute before her workday started to avoid a few minutes of the intolerable potential small talk situation with her colleagues. Another friend, Mary, whom I met two weeks after my immigration, reached out to me a few months later and terrifyingly shared that she needed to provide an emergency contact for her child. Desperately unsure of who to turn to, she asked if I could be that person for her first newborn.

Middle-aged immigrants, the largest segment of the immigrant population, face unique barriers related to the social adaptation process (Fiori & Denckla, 2015). Midlife, which typically takes place approximately between the ages of 40 and 60, is a developmental stage marked by shifting social, intrapersonal, and health factors, distinguishing it from early adulthood and later life. During this period, adults can encounter the complex and evolving social roles of balancing parenting, caregiving, and work while friendship becomes paramount to survival by being blended with those roles (Fiori & Denckla, 2015). Providing positive support and sharing a historical context during the highly complex middle-aged years turn friends into unique and effective support. Since midlife can be associated with family composition changes, for some individuals, close friends can serve as a buffer against the negative effect of acculturative stress (Soufi Amlashi et al., 2024). This aligns with the finding that middle-aged adults, due to their advanced age, can be more motivated to foster high-quality emotionally significant relationships with close informal support (Fiori & Denckla, 2015).

April 2011 (My new immigrant friend and colleague Marielle gave birth to her twins. I have been in a new country for nine months):

> Speaking of close support, this event stands out as one of the most memorable in my life. At my first workplace in a new country, I had a colleague and friend, Marielle, who was pregnant and due to give birth soon. One day, I arrived at work as usual and received a phone call from her. She informed me that she had been admitted to the hospital and was about to go into labor. Her husband was out of the country, and his manager had given him an ultimatum: If he left, he might not be able to return to work. Marielle was alone in a new country, giving birth to twins after a high-risk pregnancy. Having experienced childbirth myself and knowing how frightening it can be, I asked to leave work in the middle of the day and went to the hospital. After a long and tense day, I found myself standing beside Marielle in the labor room, holding her hand and ultimately cutting the umbilical cords of two bundles of joy, labeled “Baby A” and “Baby B.” Despite

> the unpredictability and stress of the situation, our shared experience made a world of difference for both of us.

Friendship or finding another yourself

Having a true friend is one of the most meaningful and essential parts of being human and it is fundamental for maneuvering through the social world (Afshordi & Liberman, 2021). Lu et al. (2021) conducted comprehensive research exploring prioritizing friendship outcomes in 99 countries worldwide. The results from their study suggest that valuing friendships is broadly correlated with improved health, enhanced well-being, and greater happiness. Research highlights that friendship provides opportunities for personal growth (Yucel & Dincer, 2024) and is characterized by security, self-worth, trust, practical support, and the feeling of being loved for who you are (Lu et al., 2021; Pahl, 2000). Aristotle explores the connectedness between friends and explains that a person relates to their friend much like they relate to themselves, since, in some respects, a friend is a reflection of one's self (Aristotle, 1976, as cited in Doyle & Smith, 2002).

May 2021 (My friend Anette came back from her extended family visit back home):

> Anette and I were different, but she was definitely my self reflection, and we already established a private lexicon of our friendship, a so-called familect (Gordon, 2009). Perhaps the next true story illustrates the special connection friends can have: We were staring at each other and could hardly utter a word. Anette and I couldn't believe it. It happened a year or two after we met. Anette had just come back from her trip and was telling me about their family gatherings and the usage of a train to save time and squeeze more visits into a very tight schedule. While listening to her, my hand slipped into my pocket, and to my utter amazement, I took out a ticket from a previous ride on the same company's train. It was a first unexplainable coincidence that kept repeating itself later in various ways. We attended the same activities or bought the same items without knowing, cooked the same dishes, or dressed in the same colors without planning. Since then, we've given a name to all those inexplicable coincidences and called it "the train."

Although friendship is a common and universal human experience, understanding the various forms it can take remains limited (Anderson, 2001; Pahl, 2000). Both authors underscore the lack of attention to diverse experiences within friendships, that tend to be influenced by time, location, and various social groups' structures. Pahl (2000) highlights the importance of setting and context since friendship dynamics are shaped by the distinct social environment in which they are formed. Emotional support may function as a defining characteristic of friendship in individualistic societies (Lu et al., 2021), while the exchange of practical help among friends may be widely adopted by collectivist cultures (Fiori & Denckla, 2015). From a gender standpoint, women tend to prioritize friendship more highly than men (Lu et al., 2021), while women's relationships are generally based on emotional closeness, and men's typically center around shared activities (Ayers et al., 2023; Fiori & Denckla, 2015). Regarding lifespan, the research

implies that friendships may be more important during the most productive midlife period than at other points of life (Fiori & Jager, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2023). Friendships also become increasingly vital in older individuals' lives, particularly those without children or who live far away from family (Pahl, 2000). Additionally, friendship is shaped by various life phases and special circumstances, with immigration being one of the most significant (Westcott, 2017).

Immigrants' friendships or the prisoners' story

Family separation, discrimination, job insecurity, and trauma experienced before and after migration, and cultural barriers are some of the factors that have been negatively impacting immigrants' health and well-being (Derr, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2013). Newcomers who experience acculturative stress may also face dynamics of power and oppression (Driscoll & Torres, 2022) and develop mental health illnesses (Soufi Amlashi et al., 2024). Loss-related trauma and displacement disrupt social cohesion and networks, which bring a sense of loneliness – one of the fundamental parts of being an immigrant (Akhtar, 2009). Immigrants may miss the familiar socialization and enduring friendships typical of their home country. To compensate for this need, they may seek to establish connections often with members of their community.

Forming and maintaining friendships from familiar communities becomes critically important, and the multiple roles these friendships usually play are intensified (Akhtar, 2009). For most immigrants, friends from the same background are invaluable in the new country. Shared language, historical experiences, culinary tastes, and ethnic festivals create strong bonds similar to naturally evolving friendships in one's country. Akhtar (2009) describes related immigrants' reflections while meeting newcomers from the same community during the first few weeks in the USA: "When he introduced us to them, I immediately felt a sense of familiarity. It was like 'instant soup mix'… Just open the can, add water, and there you have it. The comfort my husband and I felt with people of similar backgrounds was instant" (p. 257). This preference for connectedness might be understood and described as a "gravity-like force" (Smith, 2018, p. 1858). It serves as a refuge for those gradually acculturating into broader society, a permanent anchor for those less prepared to face integration challenges, and a refueling station for more assimilated newcomers (Akhtar, 2009).

September 2021 (Reflecting on the connection we shared with Anette and our mutual need for one another):

> Sometimes, when writing a card to Anette, I would humorously begin with "Dear Prisoner," and it would always make us laugh because it held a special meaning for us. Once meeting, we often couldn't stop talking since there was so much to discuss and consult on: work, kids, parents, immigration, health, repairs, volunteering, and of course, our constant ongoing need for resources and information. It always felt like we would never be able to resolve everything and find a moment of respite. To us, our friendship was a mutually developed all-inclusive SureZone. Metaphorically, our regular difficulty in bidding farewell

> reminded me of an old anecdote I once shared with her: “Two female prisoners, who had spent 10 years in the same cell, finished their sentences and were released at the same time. Freshly released, they couldn’t stop discussing their issues while standing outside the prison gate.” Anette and I could both identify with the metaphor. Immigration and emotional imprisonment share commonalities, such as loneliness, dependence, new rules and norms, a sense of depersonalization in certain aspects, and a desperate need for support. We were endlessly happy to have each other.

The family you choose or there is someone else who loves your children

Immigration to different countries, including Canada, often disrupts extended family caregiving since only the spouse and dependent children are permitted to accompany the primary immigration applicant. This process is designed to support immediate family living rather than extended family arrangements (Ansion & Merali, 2018). In some cases, certain families, under particular conditions, manage to immigrate at or close to the same time. For instance, relatives can be sponsored to come to a new country, but only if the settled family members can prove they can financially support them for a decade or two—a significant challenge for most newcomers. Therefore, many newcomers’ families need to leave their extended family behind for an extended period when moving to a new place (Ansion & Merali, 2018). The loss of extended family support, especially during challenging middle-aged years, leads to one of the main adaptation needs for newcomers - building their new social support networks (Chang et al., 2024). The families conveyed that friends as a new source of support became almost like surrogate family members (Ackerman et al., 2007). This is particularly evident when children of newcomers refer to new family friends as relatives (e.g., aunties) (Ansion & Merali, 2018).

June 2024 (A phone conversation with my friend, Helga, who was talking about her daughter, Karina):

> This topic reminded me of a phone call that I recently had with my friend who called to tell me about the conversation she had with her teenage daughter.
> Helga: I remember that we just discussed your paper topic, and it is funny that Karina asked me yesterday: “Who is Sabina’s daughter to you?” She doesn’t know anything about your research topic, but it was important for her to make this connection in her brain.
> Me: Oh, wow! That is interesting and it is exactly related to what my essay is about.
> Helga: Yeah, I immediately thought about you. So, you know Karina, she needs clear answers. I told her that Sabina’s daughter is like my niece, and I could see how relieved she felt since it confirmed her feeling that she feels like a cousin to your daughter and a niece to you.

The following reflection offers another layer of complexity to how immigration, friendship, and extended family may intertwine in the lives of middle-aged immigrants.

February 2024 (Memories of my first-degree relative's first visit to reconnect with the family in our new country):

> I had a memorable experience a few months ago when my friends assisted not only me but also my extended family members. After years of hesitation, our relative finally came to visit us in our new country. During his stay, he accidentally hurt his back, prompting me to call late at night my friend, Helga, for advice. After a brief conversation, she and her partner announced they were coming to help, even though it was almost the middle of the night.
> The following morning, another close friend, Juliana, who is a medical practitioner, brought over a bag of medications. I hadn't even had the chance to call her; however, Helga had already contacted her and explained the situation. This exemplifies the critical role of close friends in immigration and my eyes become wet each time I recall this episode. As an older family member, my relative post factum summed it up perfectly: "Now I am calm knowing that you have a real family here."

In the research that examined Latino immigrant experiences raising their children in the absence of extended family, the parents indicated that they formed close support connections that they called "just like family" to compensate for the loss of their relatives' support in the new place (Ansion & Merali, 2018, p. 419). The absence of extended family enhances the burden on parental responsibilities that are connected to loneliness, burnout, fear, and worry (Ansion & Merali, 2018). A big worry for immigrants can be the understanding that missing extended family means a lack of additional caring individuals who love and express love to the children, something that is essential and fundamental to their growth and development (Liao, 2006). Liao describes the importance of the "extended family" model where uncles and aunts, or grandparents sometimes share a notable portion of the childcare with the parents, including love and affection for the children (Liao, 2006, p. 438). Bailey (1988) has termed the familial connection of unrelated individuals "psychological kinship" (p. 132). Akhtar (2009) describes notable characteristics of immigrants' homo-ethnic dynamics in their resemblance to early family relationships, where friends are referred to as sisters or brothers and children view older individuals as aunts or uncles. Out of necessity, friends as support networks take on various familiar roles, duties, and functions that would typically be fulfilled by family and kin (Pahl, 2000) and may become a *chosen* (non-kinship) *family* (Yucel & Dincer, 2024).

A chosen family refers to a group of individuals to whom a person feels a strong emotional connection, often due to shared circumstances, and who are considered family, even though they are not biological or legal relatives (Gates, 2017, as cited in Kim & Feyissa, 2021). According to Weeks et al. (2001), a chosen family is characterized by kinship-like, friendship-driven relationships marked by deep commitment. Kim and Feyissa (2021) explored the role of found families within the queer refugee community and their importance for well-being and the

settlement process. The researchers argue that, in addition to losing their social ties when fleeing their homeland, refugees face resettlement distress, isolation, and acculturative stress. Thus, forming new family-like relationships is essential for newcomers' social inclusion, resilience, and sense of belonging. Kim and Feyissa (2021) revealed that chosen family relationships are "just as important as the original biological family" and act as a "safety net in the settlement process" (p. 12).

March 2024 (My reflection on the sisterly bond that naturally formed between Anette and me):

> Anette taught me the true meaning of sisterhood. I never had a sister, but Anette had two and plenty of experience. Remarkably, in the middle of my life, I discovered sisterhood in the best possible way – it was a sisterhood that I chose, allowing me to define the kind of sister I wanted to be. It's ironic and fascinating how a friend can introduce you to a new family role. Of course, it wasn't entirely conscious, and it took time for this level of intimacy and trust to develop. Within a few years, our friendship evolved from being "sisters in distress" to "soul sisters." Both of our immediate families benefited from this caring extended family, and we deeply appreciated having someone else who cared and loved our children.

Losing a friend to death as an immigrant or the system shuts down to survive

Friends become as significant as family ties during the most productive midlife years of immigrants (Fiori & Denckla, 2015), and the death of such a friend is akin to losing a family member (Ackerman et al., 2007). Intensifying the sorrow and leaving an emotional gap may result in grief experienced when a family member dies, and it can be particularly challenging for an immigrant, exposing profound uniquely compounded, and complicated grief (Akhtar, 2009; Johnsen et al., 2023).

Hall (2014) views grief as an inherent aspect of human existence, that can be understood as the comprehensive response to loss, encompassing its cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions. Research suggests that grief reflects the deep emotional connections we form with individuals (Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022), in other words, it is the price people pay for love (Hall, 2014). The strong maternal aspects such as the joy of meeting, the frequent contact, the pool of memories, and feeling somewhat incomplete without the other's presence in one's life contribute to why the death of close friends can be particularly challenging for newcomers (Akhtar, 2009; Johnsen et al., 2023).

May 2022 (My memories and reflections on the time when Anette passed away):

> I remember the night when Anette died and it was unbearable and endless. Early in the morning, I got a phone call from my manager: "Good morning, Sabina," she greeted me

> warmly, as usual. I remember barely being able to respond, saying it was not a good morning.
> For days, I couldn't speak; the only "words" my body could produce were tears. The world lost its colors, sounds, and smells. My emotional existence was paralyzed, and my body operated on autopilot. The body had to keep functioning while the rest of my system shut down to survive. I think an immigrant brain places survival mechanisms at the forefront, ensuring all necessary tools are always available and accessible from the first sign of a threat to the survival system.
> I knew I needed to help and support Anette's immediate family, who had no one here except a few friends. I knew I had to be there for her children, her "lives", as she called them. I knew I had to go to work and continue fulfilling my other roles. I also knew, most likely unconsciously… that my pain and grief would have to wait…

Non-kinship grief, despite being a ubiquitous experience, has received limited focus in the literature (Johnsen et al., 2023; Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022). Most research on grief has concentrated on the death of a first-degree relative, often focusing on the loss of a spouse (Liu et al., 2019). Although the death of a friend is a common human experience, friends are ranked low in the grief hierarchy and are considered less significant mourners compared to kinship members (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019; Robson & Walter, 2013). This type of grief may not be openly expressed or recognized (Johnsen et al., 2023). Its physical or psychological effects may be deemed illegitimate, leading to a form of grief where the impact of losing a friend may be trivialized or not given the same recognition to grieve as those experiencing kinship bereavement (Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022; Liu et al., 2019). Poole and Galvan (2021) highlight that in many marginalized groups, especially immigrant communities, there are substantial barriers to mourning close friends — such as the need to provide proof of familial ties if they need to take a leave of absence to attend or organize funerals for those considered chosen family.

Disfranchised grief or my grief would have to wait

Disenfranchised grief, or hidden sorrow, refers to grief that is not recognized or validated by social norms (Doka, 1989, 1999), when an individual experiences a loss that cannot be overtly mourned, and that is not publicly acknowledged or supported by society (Hall, 2014; Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022). Disenfranchised grief manifests in different forms, including when the loss is not recognized, the significance of the relationship with the loss is not validated, and the griever and the way their sorrow is displayed do not align with societal expectations (Cesur-Soysal & Ari, 2024; Doka, 1989, 2002; Hall, 2014). Grieving non-kinship relationships, such as the loss of a close friend, often lacks social legitimacy, resulting in a marginalized and unsupported experience of grief (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019).

Disenfranchisement is not solely imposed by others, and individuals can invalidate their own loss. Self-disenfranchisement can be a result of the social context and environmental conditions

that the bereaved individual encounters (Cesur-Soysal & Ari, 2024). Not being recognized as bereaved or given the same right to grieve as the exclusive "inner circle" of family members can affect how friends perceive their role in the grieving process (Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022, p. 6). The researchers highlight feelings of being overlooked and doubting one's entitlement to grieve: "No one thought you had suffered a loss," "I understood that I am affected, but I am not bereaved," and "You felt like maybe you were overreacting" (p. 6). This marginalized form of grief places pressure on individuals to maintain normalcy in their work and social lives (Bento, 1994; Poole & Galvan, 2021), leading to reluctance to allow themselves to mourn (Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022), and avoidance of seeking help (Johnsen et al., 2023).

May 2024 (A conversation with my colleague and friend Freya after I shared my article's topic with her):

> This theme of deserving of grief reminded me of my recent conversation with Freya when she shared with me one of her childhood stories. "We called her Aunty Maryam. She was my mom's best friend, but our families were so close that she was like an aunty to us. When Aunty Maryam died, we couldn't explain to others that our family friend had passed away because they wouldn't grasp the true meaning and significance of this loss. So, we told everyone that our aunt had died. This way, we received validation for our grief and were not excluded from mourning."

Western society is often characterized as product-focused and death-denying with its base built on capitalistic economic structure and patriarchal hierarchies within major social institutions (Harris, 2009; Wood & Williamson, 2003). The values of happiness, future-focus, consumerism, and productivity that prevail in modern Western cultures are at odds with the experience of grief, which is marked by dwelling on the past, sadness, and a lack of motivation (Kofod, 2021). Poole & Galvan (2021) argue that the ideological system privileges grief expressions that are time-bound, subdued, and non-disruptive to capitalism. They also emphasize that research on grief has primarily focused on diagnosable medical models, economic factors, and recovery, while often excluding marginalized communities.

The Western worldview frames a person's inability to work as a temporary choice, with the threat of being pathologized, medicalized, or institutionalized if it persists. Bereavement is often treated as a brief, recovery-based process, after which individuals are expected to return to work fully functional (Poole & Galvan, 2021). The researchers assert that collective agreements are typically driven by white supremacy discourses and grant minimal leave, often failing to accommodate the cultural or religious mourning traditions of marginalized communities, such as Indigenous, Black, Jewish, and Muslim groups. Some agreements require proof of death or confirmation of familial ties, discriminating against those who do not follow contemporary Western funeral practices.

Various unwritten but widely understood social rules for grieving in most Western societies shape the bereavement experience and determine who, how intense, how long, where, and for

whom it is appropriate to grieve (Doka, 1989; Poole & Galvan, 2021). Contemporary society imposes "affective regulation" on both those grieving and their social circles, determining in what situations and in what ways it is appropriate to discuss grief and loss (Kofod, 2021, p. 439). Strong societal pressures can influence bereaved individuals to conform to social grieving norms, even when following these rules may prolong their suffering after a loss. To be more socially acceptable, those individuals may cover their grief with stoicism or look for covert ways to grieve privately, even though they do not cope alone (Johnsen et al., 2023). The consequences of not adhering to these norms can be severe, including job loss due to decreased productivity, lack of support, diminished status, and feelings of shame for not meeting expected standards or appearing weak in a competitive environment (Harris, 2009).

By failing to recognize certain forms of grief, society is making it challenging for bereaved individuals to begin navigating the healing process and allowing them to express their sorrow. The absence of recognition and support can act as a risk factor for prolonged grief effects in individuals whose close friends have died (Johnsen et al., 2023). Research shows that bereaved friends might experience intense emotions of hopelessness, frustration, and isolation when their loss is not recognized or understood by society (Cesur-Soysal & Ari, 2024). The researchers explain that following such losses, immigrants may be deprived of the mourning process essential for adaptation to a new country, which may result in an inability to express or even recognize their various emotions.

There is a notable scarcity of literature on the disenfranchised or self-disfranchised grief experiences of immigrants grieving the non-kinship death of significant others, such as close friends. Those experiences further marginalize immigrant communities, pushing them into an even more peripheral position in their grief. Layering the intricate lived experiences of immigration on top of the loss of primary support in a new country, all within the context of disenfranchised grief, creates a unique and multifaceted reality.

"Death is everywhere, but it's also nowhere" asserts Harris (2009, p. 248). The author emphasizes that while grief is a shared and universal human experience, societal expectations in modern countries demand it to be concealed, treating it as a source of embarrassment rather than a natural outcome of love and connection.

Method overview

This article is grounded in an autoethnographic approach**,** which allowed me, as the writer, to explore a deeply personal experience while situating it within a broader sociocultural context. Although I did not conduct formal autoethnographic research, I intentionally followed an autoethnographic method**,** drawing from personal recollections, text messages, reflective notes, life events, and personal documentation to create a reflective narrative of lived experience (Wall, 2008). My interest in this reflexive mode of inquiry was sparked during an epistemology course, where I began to keep a more intentional record of my reflections. Writing became both a method of exploration and a process of meaning-making (Miller, 2008). I revisited moments from my life, often returning to memories multiple times to more fully understand their significance within the broader contexts of immigration, friendship, and grief.

The analytic process involved the careful revision of personal narratives, the identification of recurring themes, and the connection of individual experiences to broader sociocultural frameworks. I was positioned as both insider (subject) and outsider (researcher) (Ellis et al., 2011), aiming to richly describe personal realities while also engaging in analytical interpretation, not simply to fill a gap in the literature, but to contribute to a broader conversation that values lived experience as meaningful knowledge (Wall, 2008).

The process was shaped by a strong commitment to relational and narrative ethics**.** Key ethical considerations included being reflexive about my positionality and maintaining a thoughtful balance between analytical distance and personal disclosure. One of the central ethical practices I followed was protecting the privacy of those involved by using pseudonyms and removing identifying details about places and events. When writing narratives that included others' words or experiences, I sought and received their consent. In particular, I reached out to Anette's family to request permission to share parts of our friendship story and to use the name I had chosen for her. Their response, offering not only consent but also encouragement and anticipation, was deeply meaningful and reaffirmed the importance of telling this story with care and gratitude.

Autoethnography invites us to witness lived experience and to create accessible, emotionally resonant material that can reach those often overlooked by traditional academic research (Ellis et al., 2011). It offers a way to bring personal knowledge into a space typically dominated by expert voices (Muncey, 2005, as cited in Wall, 2008), to challenge dominant discourses and to embrace writing as a socially just act (Ellis et al., 2011).

Clinical and practical implications on global and local levels

As the first article to delve into the intersection of immigration, acculturative stress, friendship, and disenfranchised grief, it offers a firsthand perspective and gives voice to the unique and deeply personal loss of immigrant friends. Since the topic touches on universal experiences that resonate both internationally and locally, there are meaningful implications for immigration specialists, mental health professionals, healthcare providers, policymakers, and other key figures in host communities.

Immigration services are encouraged to recognize the importance of non-kin relationships, creating more opportunities for community connections and facilitating access to resources as newcomers face the complex challenge of rebuilding their social networks. They are encouraged to develop programs tailored to different age groups, duration of residence in Canada, lack of extended family in the new country, and other specific needs. These could include group volunteering opportunities, clubs for new arrivals, support networks for parents with young children, social circles for older adults, and adoptive family support. Enhancements should address acculturative stress and other immigration-related challenges, ensuring some services extend beyond the milestone of citizenship to better support long-term integration.

Healthcare and mental health professionals are urged to understand the significance of acculturative stress and the impact of the death of friends for immigrants and offer effective

support to mitigate the negative effects of disenfranchised grief on physical and mental health. Social work practitioners are encouraged to deepen their insight into the significance of social ties for newcomers and the unique experiences of grief they encounter. This enhanced perspective will improve their ability to address cultural losses, adaptation stresses, and grief-related needs of their clients, integrating these considerations into assessments, interventions, referrals, supervision, training, and other professional practices. Additionally, it is recommended to develop more group-based, community-oriented, culturally sensitive, and language-competent services that cater to individuals and families in rural and remote areas, as well as people with disabilities, queer individuals, and other marginalized groups.

Bereavement-related workplace policies play a crucial role in supporting employees during times of loss. According to Canadian provincial legislation (Poole & Galven, 2021), nonunionized workers typically receive two unpaid days of bereavement leave for certain family members, such as a spouse, siblings, parents, or dependent relatives. Collective agreements often define a hierarchy of family relations to allocate bereavement leave, with the most time off granted for the loss of parents, children, and spouses — usually five days. Grandparents, in-laws and grandchildren fall into a secondary category, while nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles may be eligible for one day, though this can vary.

For many immigrants, new family networks are formed upon settling in Canada. The requirement to prove familial ties can prevent workers from attending or arranging funerals for their chosen family, forcing a difficult decision between taking time off and losing income. Policymakers are urged to broaden bereavement policies to better accommodate cultural and religious needs, create equitable policies for unionized and nonunionized employees, recognize grief beyond the loss of immediate family members, and increase provisions of bereavement days to include significant non-kin relationships.

The role of social work

Social work plays a critical role within the context of grief, immigration, and friendship. Social workers, with a client-centred and holistic approach, can bridge the gap between immigrants' needs and available resources, validate and highlight grief experiences, and offer culturally competent support. By using anti-oppressive and trauma-informed frameworks, social work can challenge systemic barriers, including bereavement policies, faced by marginalized communities whose grief may not be recognized by mainstream institutions.

The absence of formal or culturally relevant support can have a profound impact on an immigrant's grief journey, potentially leading to heightened emotional distress, prolonged grief, and, in some cases, severe physical or mental health issues.

Social workers, in their roles across various sectors, are uniquely positioned to amplify the voices of those who are often silenced and advocate for changes that ensure their grief and experiences are acknowledged, respected, and meaningfully supported.

Conclusion

Given that death is a universal phenomenon, I would like to conclude this article with calls to action to recognize the death of a close friend as a significant loss and grief experience. The immigrant population faces unique challenges in dealing with such a loss, including concurrent stresses, a history of previous losses, the absence of extended family, the reality of being new in a different social context, and often considering close friends as a substitute for family. Acknowledging bereaved immigrant friends as a group experiencing detrimental consequences can serve as an international prompt for diverse services to assist this specific demographic.

This article aims to raise societal and academic awareness of the unique intersection of these human realities. It calls for the creation of grief-context-specific models tailored to the circumstances of immigrants across various support and navigation services. Additionally, it seeks to provide language and create space to acknowledge and validate grief over a friend's death, recognizing and appreciating the essential and immeasurable role friends play in people's lives, particularly for immigrants.

This pivotal shift, metaphorically speaking, creates a place where grief can navigate the healing journey, discover meaning, attain solace, and be fully honored—a place where *grief* can finally find its *home*.

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