Friendship Orphanhood

Visual Narratives of Immigration, Cultural Bereavement, and Disenfranchised Grief in the Pursuit of Meaning, Equity, and Inclusion.

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ABSTRACT

This article emerges from the profound experience of losing my best friend, Annie - the loss that reshaped my identity as a person, clinician, and researcher. Though the grief remains vivid, time has allowed me to deeply connect with what I describe as the emotional state of "*friendship orphanhood"* and to explore the transformative potential of loss. Through a blend of personal autoethnographic and visual narratives, this article invites readers into a journey of meaning reconstruction following loss. It sheds light on the often-overlooked realities of non-kinship grief, examining the complex interplay between migratory losses and the death of a close friend while navigating life in Western Society. Through a critical lens, this paper delves into the social construction of grief in a contemporary context, shaped by deeply internalized values of capitalism, productivity, and youth. These norms function as mechanisms of compliance that uphold the interests of the dominant group, producing a distinct form of oppression that marginalizes immigrant friends as less recognized mourners.

The discussion is grounded in constructivist, disenfranchised grief, and cultural bereavement theoretical frameworks, as well as art-based methods. It presents a method that uses

expressive narratives and art to externalize inner realities and support healing through cohesive meaning-making in loss.

Offering a glimpse into the silenced grief of immigrant friendships, this work contributes to scholarly and professional discourse by proposing new ways to understand, restore, and repair fragmented life stories. It underscores the urgency of acknowledging these often-voiceless bereavement experiences while addressing social injustice, confronting systemic oppression, and advocating for grief diversity.

> *"The back of their necks is the most delicious spot to smell them. I can't… It's the sweetest spot. It's crazy, but my mother-in-law still smells her grown-up children that way, and says they still have the same scent as when they were little. Annie was trying to convince me, and we both laughed about this, since we each had our favourite spots to breathe in our children's scents. For Annie, it was the back of their necks, while my favourite spot was their feet after a warm shower, just as they fell asleep in their beds. To me, their feet carried that magical, youthful scent, mingled with the warmth of the bed. This conversation was just one of the countless little things that made our friendship so special and intimate. When Annie would text me "Good night," sometimes I'd just reply with two emojis—a nose and a foot—and she'd send back a laughing emoji. She always knew exactly what I meant and understood that no one else shared my little secret ritual.*

KEYWORDS: constructivism; cultural bereavement; friendship; disenfranchised grief; autoethnography; art.

Introduction

As a researcher and clinician, I was struck by the realization that the loss journeys of bereaved immigrants grieving a friend's death remain notably underexplored, despite arising at the intersection of widely lived realities of relocation, friendship, and grief. Rooted in my own experience of friendship loss within the migratory journey, along with my passion for writing and art, I aim to provide a unique perspective on these marginalized and disenfranchised non-kinship grief realities.

While the loss of a friend is a universally shared experience, Western society, frequently characterized as grief-denying, youth-oriented, and rooted in consumerism (Macdonald, 2020; Poole & Galvan, 2021; Wood & Williamson, 2003), tends to diminish the significance of this type of loss. Grounded in patriarchal hierarchies and materialistic values that are often prioritized over humanistic ones, a societal structure creates rules about "which lives and bodies are worthy of which grief responses" (Poole & Galvan, 2021, p.63). The tension between these dominant values and authentic human experiences leads to the marginalization of bereaved friends, denying them recognition and ultimately creating a distinct form of oppression (Harris, 2009). Within the hierarchy of mourners, friends are typically placed in a subordinate position, considered less significant grievers compared to family members (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019).

Relocating from one's country of origin to a new land can create profound ruptures and disruptions, often resulting in cultural bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1988, 1991), even when the decision to immigrate is intentional and planned. The loss of familiar sociocultural anchors (Bhugra & Becker, 2005) exposes individuals to the complexities of identity reconstruction (Beauregard, 2020). Unlike other forms of grief, which are often confined to a specific domain, cultural bereavement is multifaceted and touches multiple dimensions of an individual's life (Elghezouani, 2016, as cited in Beauregard, 2020).

Similar to migratory loss, grief following a death involves the search for meaning in a new reality, forming a central part of constructing one's identity (Beauregard et al., 2017a). Constructivist theory posits that individuals develop their understanding of the world through

interactions and personal experiences, interpreting events to create meaning (Amineh & Davatgari, 2015), reconstruct their sense of self and restore fragmented life trajectories. When immigrants face language barriers compounded by the profound sorrow of loss, and that is too overwhelming for words, “the art speaks” for them (Nelson et al., 2024, p. 732), offering a safe emotional outlet for restoring life narratives (Beauregard, 2020).

To immerse the reader in the experience and deepen scholarly and practical conversations, I have woven in autoethnographic threads, sharing personal memories and reflections. The writing was guided by a strong commitment to narrative and relational ethics, involving reflexivity in my own disclosures, safeguarding the privacy of those involved through pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details, and ensuring informed consent. The examination begins with cultural bereavement theory and the significance of close friends as surrogate family members, then delves into the complex experience of a friend’s death, highlighting grief responses that often parallel those of familial bereavement. The discussion next introduces the concept of meaning reconstruction, an essential process for adapting to and integrating grief (Neimeyer, 2020). This is followed by an exploration of expressive art, where collage, used as an interpretive and intuitive tool (Wier & McCloskey, 2020), provides a meaningful avenue for grievers who may struggle with verbal and emotional language to process loss and seek meaning. The final section critically examines policy, practice, and academic implications for social work and other fields, offering strategies to support, educate, and advocate for individuals and communities in advancing social change.

This article aims to theorize and shed light on the unique and underexamined grief experiences of left-behind bereaved immigrant friends mourning their chosen family in Western society. It also seeks to explore and present the use of collage as an expressive art method that gives form to the unbearable, reweaves meaning through visual storytelling, and folds these experiences back into the fabric of one’s life narrative.

The Loss of Home or "*I couldn't read people's faces*".

Eisenbruch (1991) introduced the concept of cultural bereavement, describing it as the uprooted person's experience arising from the loss of social structures, cultural norms and personal identity. Cultural bereavement is unique to the migratory context, as it involves the severing of the bond between a person and their 'home' (Beauregard, 2020), which can cause disruptions and fractures, even if the decision to relocate is intentional (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

Unlike the loss of a loved one, cultural grief presents unique specificities. While death marks a definitive loss, the homeland endures, and immigrants often maintain a deep mental and emotional connection to their country of origin (D' Amore, 2015, as cited in Beauregard, 2020). The sense of ambiguity makes it challenging to fully mourn the loss of the homeland since even if it persists in their memory, returning is often unfeasible for various reasons. Another distinctive specificity of the phenomenon is its multidimensional component, since it affects various socio-cultural aspects of a newcomer's life. This aspect sets cultural bereavement apart from death-followed grief, which typically involves a more singular loss of a loved one (Elghezouani, 2016, as cited in Beauregard, 2020). The multidimensional and ambiguous nature of cultural bereavement makes it more challenging for newcomers to process and name their losses, which can impact their sense of identity and belonging to the new environment. Immigrants often experience the profound struggle of realigning their identity to include aspects of the foreign land while still preserving ties to their cultural roots (Beauregard, 2020).

January 2011 Reflections on my first months as a new immigrant

I vividly remember a deeply unsettling feeling that washed over me. I couldn't quite put it into words - it was as if I had lost the ability to read the emotions of the people around me. Were they happy? Were they concerned or disagreeing? Their unfamiliar facial features felt unexpressive and flat to me. It was overwhelming - I felt like I had lost a fundamental part of how I understood and navigated the social world. On top of the ordinary weight of immigrant life, the quiet ache of cultural fatigue and constant vigilance, comes the unaffordable luxury of illness, the disorientation of unfamiliar geography, the confusing

> *shelves of packaging in grocery stores/pharmacies, and even the skyline itself, wearing a different shade of blue. But none of that prepared me for the disorienting realization that my "radars" couldn't sense the people around me. It left me frantically searching for clues, intensely trying to understand the social and emotional rhythms of the people on the other side of the globe, in my new resettled home.*

Friendship in a New Land or "*I am here because my wife made me come*"

The sense of losing a familiar compass and feeling alone is deeply embedded in the immigrant experience (Akhtar, 2009), which encapsulates a journey marked by withdrawal, anomie, and profound loss, especially in the early years after relocation (Anison & Merali, 2017). While mourning these losses, immigrants often deeply miss the enduring friendships and effortless social interactions they once enjoyed 'back home', leading them to seek solace and connection within familiar communities (Akhtar, 2009). Though shared fragments of their homeland foster these bonds, it is the collective experience of shared existential boat and the mutual struggle with psychosocial and cultural challenges that unite them. According to Akhtar (2009), it is hard to underestimate the strength of the friendship bond and its essential role in navigating crisis and trauma. As one of the primary sources of comfort, friendship fosters self-awareness and a sense of belonging (Schulman, 2009), which, at higher levels, has been found to protect against the adverse effects of cultural bereavement among immigrants (Beauregard et al., 2017a; Beauregard, 2020). For newcomers, building friendships holds paramount significance, as the roles these relationships typically serve become heightened and essential, and the pleasure of shared lived realities offers a sense of containment and strength (Akhtar, 2009).

Another notable aspect of immigrants' close relationships is how they resemble early family bonds, as deep friendships can often evoke kinship-like dynamics (Ackerman et al., 2007). The researchers state that the psychology of those bonds often mirrors that of family ties, leading these bonds to be perceived as akin to kinship. Friends can affectionately refer to each other as brothers and sisters, and children view family friends as aunts and uncles. Beneath this familial

language lies a deeper dynamic where non-relatives are regarded and treated as family members (Akhtar, 2009; Anison & Merali, 2017), also referred to as “chosen family” (Kim & Feyissa, 2021).

November 2020 My phone conversation with Annie highlighted the deep bond we shared

Annie couldn’t stop laughing over the phone, and now, years later, as I recall that conversation, I find myself smiling with my whole being.

"You won’t believe it—she thought we were a couple! Like, actual partners," Annie said between bursts of laughter.

"Who?" I asked, intrigued. "Who thought that?"

"Libby—the cashier at the grocery store. You know, the one we sometimes chat with when we’re there," Annie replied, her laughter bubbling over again (Annie and I tried to spend as much time as possible together. We’d grocery shop together, often driving together, sharing a cart or paying for each other).

"What?!" I exclaimed, already giggling in anticipation of where the story was going.

"I went to Costco with Oakley," Annie continued, referring to her husband, "and Libby was there. She asked me, “Where’s your partner?” Oakley jumped in right away, saying, “I’m her partner! The only one!” But he and I knew who she meant. It was you. The three of us were cracking up in the store, and I couldn’t wait to tell you."

Annie and I both knew we were chosen family for each other, but what surprised us was how obvious our closeness was to others, even to people outside our inner circle. From that day on, we started jokingly calling each other "my wife." If one of us showed up somewhere because of the other, it was always, "I’m only here because my wife made me come."

Grieving a Friend in a New Land or "*There is no 'place' to go*".

Cacciatore describes grief as the "most unifying aspect of the human experience" and the "inescapable truth of the human condition" that inevitably touches everyone's lives (2017, p. 18). Paradoxically, despite the undeniable universality of grief, modern conceptualizations of this phenomenon remain limited "in a state of ferment" (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014, p. 3).

Grief in displaced friendships represents a distinct population within a specific and unique socio-cultural context (Simpson, 2013). Since close immigrant friends often act as surrogate family members (Anison and Merali, 2017), their death presents a unique challenge and can be experienced with the same intensity as the loss of a family member (Akhtar, 2009). Furthermore, entire nuclear families often regard such friends as their own, making the loss a collective family grief rather than solely a personal bereavement.

Additionally, the profound loss of a close friend often brings other significant losses to the surface, intertwining with the multifaceted dimensions of cultural bereavement sorrows. Akhtar (2009, p. 259), in his study on immigrant friendships and socialization, described the loss of a friend experience: "The shared pool of memories and metaphors dries up, exposing the rocky bottom of the immigrant's aloneness." Exploring a longing that keeps the bond alive, Jonsson and Walter (2017) focused on the role of place in grief by considering where people feel closest to those they have lost, and the loss of these places can affect the ongoing connection with the deceased. They suggest that grievers who have lost these places "have to rely solely on memory," and in such cases, storytelling can help ease the experience and bring those bonds to life (p. 412).

May 2022 Personal narrative illustrating the complexities of immigrants' grief

Everything happened so quickly. Just yesterday, I was with Annie, and today, she lives only in memory. It was in the middle of the night and I didn't want to leave her, but I couldn't have imagined that it would be the last moment I would touch her and hear her final

words: "You are a true friend" when I was covering her with a blanket and telling her that I would leave only after she was deep asleep.

The next few days were a whirlwind of events that left no space or time to truly understand what had just happened or what it all meant. Annie's immediate family decided to take her on her final flight back home, where she had requested to be buried. This made perfect sense to me, given her unconditional love for the land where she was born -the soil that had given her emotional strength, yet where she hadn't been able to live for the past few years.

It wasn't until much later, after the initial shock and anguish had eased, that I realized there was no 'place' for me where I could feel closest to Annie, to be with her, or to talk to her. Her grave was across the ocean from me and other friends, and it felt as though there was no 'place' to go, but the one I had to create in my memory's quiet corner.

Disenfranchised Heartbreak of Bereaved Friends or "*Friendship Orphanhood*"

Literature argues that traditional grief concepts were developed within a consumer-driven and death-denying narrative of the contemporary West (Breen et al., 2022; Harris, 2009; Macdonald, 2020). Poole and Galvan (2021) assert that modern ideology prioritizes grief expressions that are temporally limited, emotionally restrained, and minimally disruptive to capitalist systems, frequently overlooking the experiences of marginalized populations. They describe "grief supremacy" (p. 63), arguing that research favours the experiences of white, professional, and heterosexual individuals, overlooks the grief of predominantly racialized and working-class people, who are frequently left to navigate their loss without recognition or support.

Grief that cannot be socially acknowledged and publicly mourned is referred to 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). Attig (2004) framed unprivileged grief as a political failure, highlighting the role of power and its misuse. Using a critical theory lens, Harris (2009) examines the social construction of grief within Western society

by unpacking the societal values that reinforce power, control, and oppression. Barros-Lane and colleagues (2025) further argue that internalized social norms primarily serve the interests of dominant groups by determining who is entitled to grieve, which relationships to the deceased are deemed socially valid, and what forms of grief expression are considered acceptable. Grief experiences that fall outside these norms often reinforce the oppressive system, as individuals suppress natural yet socially stigmatized responses to avoid further exclusion, even at the cost of prolonged emotional suffering (Harris, 2009).

While the death of a friend is a universal human experience, modern society often overlooks the significance of this type of grief. Crosley (2024) poignantly captures this sentiment in her memoirs: “Friendships are particularly left out of the equation. …Friendship takes the backseat” (p. 71). In the grief hierarchy, friends are typically placed lower than family members, and their grief is considered less valuable (Johnsen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019). This aligns with the prioritization of formal nuclear family relationships in modern society, both in life and death, often sidelining bonds formed through extended family or community connections (Lasch, 1977, as cited in Robson & Walter, 2013).

Since friends' grief is considered low-ranked in Western society, it lacks social recognition, shared vocabulary, and mourning practices. As a result, professional support systems often fail to recognize the diversity of grief experiences, leaving those grieving from a distance, outside the immediate circle of caregivers, without access to formal bereavement support (Breen et al., 2022). When a close friend, often experienced as a surrogate family member, dies, left-behind friends are rarely granted the support given to relatives. In addition, immigrant mourners face other unique challenges, including cultural nuances, language barriers, and unfamiliarity or mistrust of formal assistance services. This lack of recognition and support not only increases the risk of prolonged grief (Johnsen et al., 2023) but also reflects a socially unjust, inequitable, and oppressive dynamic that devalues non-kin relationships and excludes them from legitimized forms of mourning.

July 2022 Reflection on tracing the contours of my grief

> *While grieving, I found myself searching for a language to describe the depth of my emotional state- something that truly resonated with the loneliness, profound loss, and sense of endless abandonment I felt. The closest word I could find was "*orphanhood"*, a term traditionally tied to the loss of parents. Yet, despite its conventional meaning, the figurative blending of friendship and orphanhood captured my experience. The complexity unfolded through a web of emotional and cognitive contradictions: experiencing orphanhood without being an orphan, grieving deeply without being a recognized griever, losing a family member without being a relative, and reliving cultural losses without being a recent newcomer. Naming this unspoken experience - something that existed profoundly in my reality but was absent from language, and therefore from societal discourse- offered a sense of containment and relief. Even so, I still yearned for a space that could hold these scattered pieces - a space for reflection, heartfelt expression, and healing.*

Meaning Reconstruction Beyond Words or "*It will be like losing it twice*"

Constructivist theory posits that individuals construct their understanding of the world through personal experiences and social interactions. In 2014, Neimeyer and his colleagues introduced a constructivist perspective on grief, defining it as "a situated, interpretive and communicative activity" (p. 486), emphasizing the context, the role of meaning-making, and the need for shared communication of the grieving experience. Life's profound losses can disrupt the grievers' sense of identity, prompting a complex journey of rediscovering who they are, where they fit in the world (Hall, 2014), and reshaping how they make sense of their existence (Neimeyer, 2020; Nelson et al., 2024). The meaning reconstruction framework emphasizes the role of self-narratives that shape self-understanding and inform our actions in the world (Neimeyer, 2004, as cited in Neimeyer, 2020). The process of bridging different components of identity narratives is especially significant for those navigating the multilayered and uprooting experience of immigration (Beauregard, 2020). Beauregard and her colleagues (2017a) argue that much like grief, immigration involves a search for meaning, which lies at the heart of identity construction. The process of meaning formation unfolds across multiple interconnected levels, where migratory

losses intertwine with the death of a close friend, which complicates the restoration of disrupted life narratives.

Since grief often eludes verbal expression, mourners may struggle to articulate their emotions, finding it difficult to precisely convey their sorrowful reality through words (Ord, 2009). In those cases, art as an intuitive expression may serve as a universal language, bridging cultural divides, fostering connections (Wier & McCloskey, 2020), and offering a shared space for understanding. Grief often lacks an emotional language, just as immigration can sometimes lack a verbal one. By weaving together these voiceless experiences, art becomes a creative and symbolic outlet through which individuals can reconstruct meaning, integrating the layered narratives of loss (Nelson et al., 2024). In her memoir, Crosley (2024) reflects on the need to hold the sorrow and lack of understanding that: "If I do not capture what I have lost, it will be like losing it twice" (p.8)

Collage as a Construction of Healing or "*The cover of a book I might write one day*"

The healing process often involves assembling and transforming fragmented narratives into new, cohesive meanings, much like the art of crafting a collage. Collaging provides a literal and metaphorical way to reframe perspectives, offering a renewed understanding of experiences (Chilton & Scotti, 2014). The flexibility of collages allows artworks to be continuously modified (Keisari et al., 2022), evolving alongside the griever's insights and narrative transformation. Cacciatore (2017) observes that grievers may rewrite their "story of love and grief every few months or years -and seeing how it may start to change and grow" (p. 141).

November 2024 Reflecting on the need for a metaphorical space to hold my loss

The idea that I might lose it twice - first in life, and then again by not capturing my experiences and narratives deeply resonated with me. Just as I had no physical place to return to, I also had no symbolic space to hold my grief, memories, sorrow, and emotions.

For me, art offered refuge, and the collage became a sanctuary where grief could rest and be seen. It allowed me to gather, arrange, and witness all those fragments unified in one tangible form. The act of creating became a kind of creative orphanage - *a space to cradle the orphanhood I carried, offering it shape, voice, and solace. I asked myself:* "*What was our friendship with Annie about, and what did it mean to me?" Guided by those questions, I journeyed through the process with the magic of deeply personal emotional expression, where sorrow found its voice through visual storytelling*.

Photo 1: Bringing together emotional and practical materials in preparation

The collage became a symbolic space, allowing grief to unfold through the act of creation. Letters, envelopes, and postal marks represented connection, relationship, and the ache of missing someone. Cardboard boxes and pages from a dictionary symbolized relocation, journey, and the process of learning a new language. The fragility of the boxes spoke to the vulnerability of

immigrant experiences, as they carried entire lives within them. Images of books and content pages reflected chapters of life, including the story of our cherished friendship.

Photo 2: A fragment of the collage: Layering memories and symbolic reflections.

Fabric and buttons suggested notions of home and comfort, while a scroll and keys signified trust and protection. A watch evoked the passage of time - the years shared and the moment of first meeting, as handwritten images conveyed the deeply personal nature of our

friendship. A stamped envelope with a flower-shaped hole, cradling Annie's doodled flowers, held special meaning - a delicate trace of her presence, woven into the heart of the collage.

Photo 3: A fragment of the collage: Arranging and embedding meaningful words and symbols

Since the primary emotion arising from this loss was orphanhood, the word “orphan” was placed at the center of the collage. Standing as a symbolic refuge for grief and orphanhood, articulated through the words: “Finally, I have a home,” alongside the phrase “Mystery of the human heart.”

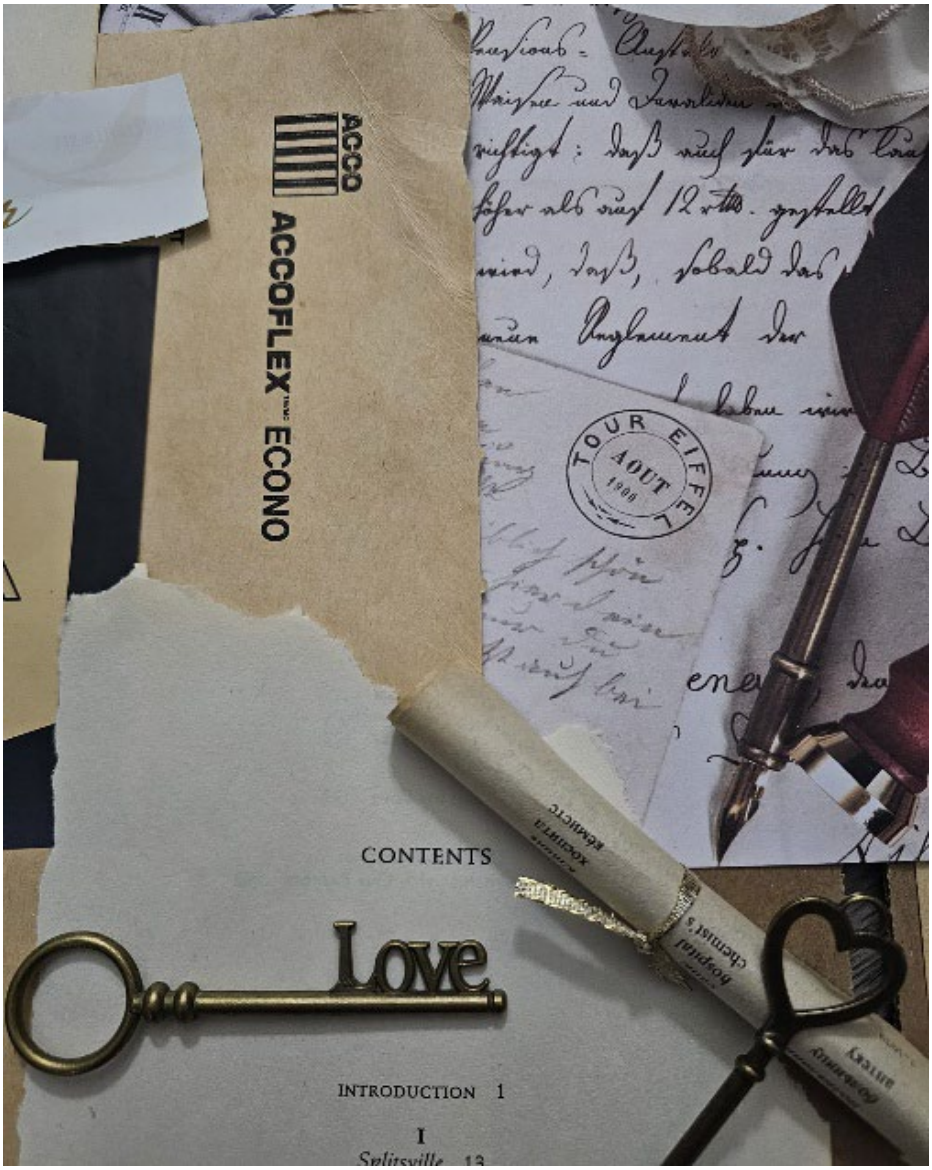

Photo 4: A fragment of the collage: Incorporating 3D objects to deepen the emotional and visual experience

One of the central threads in the friendship narrative, highlighted in the collage's content page was the word "love," attached to a key. The shared journey was rooted and shaped in Canada, the

new country both of us called home. The collage was intentionally left without a defined border, reflecting the sense of being part of something larger, not a finished or polished product, but a meaningful chapter in a larger life story.

Photo 5: A completed collage, infused with longing, love, loss, and deep appreciation

December 2024 Reflecting on collage's healing, transformative power as visual storytelling

Crafting collage unearthed a flood of deep memories that had not been easy to access. It evoked sensory recollections: the smells associated with Annie, the softness of her palms, the comforting food she cooked, and the warmth of her presence. It also brought forth

feelings of finality, deep longing, and the loss of a one-of-a-kind relationship. It reminded me of the stolen future, unfulfilled plans, and the roles I cherished in our friendship that I now miss profoundly.

Seeing all these themes, emotions, and stories visually gathered in one place magnifies their significance for me. It makes me want to share these experiences, to transform them into something meaningful, with purpose and a life of its own. When my daughter first saw the collage, she said it looked like the cover of a book I might write one day. Her comment filled me with heartfelt joy. To me, it meant the collage had a voice - that it spoke, and someone else could hear it. Perhaps one day, I will write that book, and this collage will grace its cover, carrying me back to this deeply meaningful odyssey.

Policy, Practice and Academic Implications

This section outlines directions for discussion and action concerning the broader implications across multidisciplinary professional fields related to bereavement and death in Western contexts. Brookfield (2005) critiques contemporary social structures for framing human worth in financial terms, privileging "materialistic values over the human values of compassion, skill, or creativity" (p. 162). Similarly, Harris (2009) argues that individuals who are unproductive or unable to fulfill the socially prescribed role of consumer are perceived as "a threat to the basic structure of a capitalistic society" (p. 247). Building on this critique, Arnason and Hafsteinsson (2018) highlight how neoliberalism positions the free individual as the central agent of governance and the driver of national economic prosperity, raising critical questions about the state's role and responsibility.

As key drivers of productivity, workplaces and human resources departments can play a vital role in fostering inclusivity by adopting more flexible bereavement leave policies. Such policies would acknowledge diverse grieving experiences, reduce the stigma surrounding non-kinship losses, and prevent the systemic reinforcement of disenfranchised grief. This gap is

evident in existing practices. Yankovich (2024) notes that, despite the vital caregiving roles friends often provide within chosen families, current leave policies rarely extend beyond immediate family members. In Australia, workers are granted two days of bereavement or compassionate leave following the death of a nuclear family or household member, whereas in the United States, no federal legislation addresses grief or funeral absences, and if it's available, it is generally restricted to family deaths (Yankovich, 2024). Correspondingly, Bensoussan (2024) notes that in Canada, provincial bereavement leave policies typically allow three paid days for the death of an immediate family member, but mostly after three consecutive months of employment. In Ontario, the Employment Standards Act grants non-unionized employees two unpaid bereavement days for certain family members, while collective agreements often establish hierarchies of kinship that specify the number of days permitted based on the type of family relationship (Poole & Galvan, 2021). Financial burdens further complicate access to meaningful grieving practices. According to Bensoussan (2024), an Angus Reid poll conducted in 2023 revealed that nearly 80% of Canadians would struggle to afford funeral costs after the death of a loved one. She critiques the growing trend of forgoing traditional funerals and rituals, arguing that "we are simply increasing our culture's aversion to loss and replacing the experience with a distanced, sanitized version of mourning", a shift shaped by the pressures of capitalism and the legacy of colonialism (Bensoussan, 2024, p. 130).

Specialists and decision-makers in immigration and settlement contexts are encouraged to address layered grief experiences, where personal loss is compounded by cultural grief and by hierarchies of grief. This calls for context-responsive support and advocacy to challenge bereavement policies that further marginalize newcomers. Poole and Galvan (2021) argue that current definitions of family leave little space for the realities of marginalized communities, where notions of kinship often diverge from the white, nuclear-family model embedded in organizational policies. Within many immigrant communities, chosen forms of family created after migration become central sources of care and belonging. Yet, when organizations require proof of familial ties for bereavement leave, workers may be excluded from mourning rituals for those they consider family, forced to take unpaid leave.

Social workers and other professionals working in thanatology, bereavement counselling, palliative and health care are urged to recognize and respond to the unique grief experiences that can marginalize newcomers in mourning. Yankovich (2024) points out that the absence of discourse around grieving the death of a friend is evident not only in social media and formal bereavement supports but also reflects a broader societal gap in care for those who lose their closest friends. Bensoussan (2024) stresses the urgent need to expand access to bereavement services, particularly noting that somatic, body-based therapies shown to help address the physical dimensions of grief are costly and difficult to access. Researcher and family therapist, Dr. Forbat, highlights a disconnect between the medical field's acknowledgment of the significance of close friendships and the limited recognition of these relationships in practice. To illustrate, she points out that many palliative care units send sympathy and support cards to loved ones two weeks and six months after a death, but such gestures are usually reserved for spouses or adult children (Yankovich, 2024). Similarly, Liu and co-researchers (2019) call on general practitioners and primary care providers to adopt a community-based approach, connecting bereaved individuals to social networks or religious communities to strengthen emotional support and reduce the risk of prolonged post-loss symptoms.

Academic institutions are recommended to invest in research on disenfranchised forms of grief within the context of relocation and the evolving definitions of familial and social bonds. Poole and Galvan (2021) argue that grief research has too often centered the experiences of white, cisgender, heterosexual individuals, while marginalizing or excluding other voices. By treating these dominant demographics as universally representative, research risks rendering the experiences of underrepresented groups invisible. Likewise, Bensoussan (2024) contends that contemporary social structures have stripped higher education, public discourse, and curricula of grief literacy. Considering this, educators are encouraged to raise awareness of overlooked non-kin forms of grief, adopting a critical lens that addresses social injustice, highlights the lack of grief diversity, and challenges societal norms that constrain rather than support those in mourning.

Incorporating arts-based interventions into education, research, therapy, and other multidisciplinary practices can provide grieving friends with meaningful ways to express their

loss; however, traditional approaches often neglect these inclusive methods. Collage, a creative tool that requires no special skills, allows newcomers to externalize internal realities beyond language, as it transcends linguistic barriers and connects directly to emotion through sensory and embodied expression. Visual storytelling and collage serve as powerful research tools, opening space for voices and populations often excluded from traditional scientific inquiry. Within scholarly work, integrating such creative approaches not only demonstrates methodological rigour but also introduces a vital reflexive dimension, reinforcing their value as significant contributions to qualitative and arts-based research.

This creative lens also resonates with broader critiques of social structures and priorities. As Jaffe (2021) reminds us in "Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone,*"* that work ultimately has no feelings, and capitalism cannot love. These realizations challenge dominant worldviews that place economic productivity above human connection and sustain the notion that "friendship must always sit in second place, behind other kinds of love" (Yankovich, 2024, p. 40)

Conclusion

Grieving is an inherent aspect of human connections, integral to our survival and emotional well-being. Recognizing the profound impact of loss on bereaved immigrant friends mourning chosen family is vital not only for addressing disenfranchised grief and systemic oppression but also for advancing social change that fosters equity and inclusive justice. Valuing non-kinship relationships, embracing a broader notion of family, and honouring grief in its diverse expressions affirms the dignity of all communities and helps cultivate a more inclusive society.

The concept of "friendship orphanhood" poignantly captures the deep sense of loss and longing felt when a chosen family member is gone. Validating these connections gives voice to the

voiceless and silent, and honours the enduring bonds that shape us, answering the call to remember them with depth, dignity, and gratitude.

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