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"You're Not Understood, and You're Isolated": A Narrative Account of Loneliness by Black Older Adults in Ontario, Canada

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Résumé

La solitude chez les personnes âgées, notamment parmi les groupes racisés et minorisés, est une préoccupation sanitaire et sociale de premier plan dans le monde et au Canada. Malgré des études antérieures sur la solitude parmi les groupes minorisés au Canada, on en sait peu sur la constellation de facteurs qui contribuent à la solitude parmi les personnes âgées d'origine autochtone et immigrantes noires au Canada, et sur les façons de gérer ce vécu qui sont propres à ces populations. Notre étude examine le faisceau de facteurs qui forgent les expériences de solitude parmi les immigrants noirs âgés résidant en Ontario. Nous avons intentionnellement sélectionné 13 de ces personnes et les avons interviewées en utilisant une approche narrative. Le temps comme moteur de changement, un sentiment d'appartenance renforcé par l'identité de lieu et les difficultés inhérentes à la création d'un nouveau foyer étaient les thèmes dominants de ces entretiens. Notre conclusion souligne la nécessité d'une plus grande sensibilité culturelle à l'échelle micro et macro, afin d'améliorer le sentiment d'appartenance et d'alléger la solitude chez les immigrants âgés racisés.

Abstract

Loneliness among older adults is a leading health and social concern globally and in Canada, including racialized and minoritized groups. Although previous studies have explored loneliness among ethnic minoritized groups in Canada, little is known about the constellating factors contributing to loneliness among native-born and immigrant Black older adults (BOAs) in Canada and their unique ways of dealing with the experience. Our study explores the constellating factors shaping loneliness experiences among BOAs living in Ontario. Using a narrative approach, we purposively selected and interviewed 13 BOAs. Time as a driver of change, a sense of belonging reinforced through place identity, and challenges of making a new home were dominant themes. Our finding highlights the need for increased cultural sensitivity at the micro and macro levels, which will improve a sense of belonging and reduce loneliness among racialized immigrant older adults.

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in research and policy interest in understanding loneliness and its effects and risk factors among older adults, including minoritized and racialized older adults (de Jong Gierveld, van der Pas, & Keating, 2015; Ojembe & Kalu, 2018; Victor, Dobbs, Gilhooly, & Burholt, 2021). Thus, this increased interest has contributed to the diverse ways in which loneliness has been conceptualized across the literature. However, many studies have established that loneliness is a negative and undesirable subjective feeling caused by an individual's unmet social and emotional needs characterized by emptiness or feeling unwanted (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Teater, Chonody, & Davis, 2021; van Staden & Coetzee, 2010; Weiss, 1973). In essence, one must depend on the individual's narrative of what loneliness means to them and how it affects them to understand the possible best approach to solving the problem (Wigfield, Turner, Alden, & Al, 2020). Different typologies of loneliness have been proposed, including existential, social, and emotional loneliness, which demonstrates the multidimensionality of loneliness (Smith & Victor, 2019).

Conversely, cultural loneliness has received less attention within the loneliness literature (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010). In this article, we reflect on Weiss's typology of loneliness, which defines loneliness "as a response to relational deficit," emphasizing emotional and social loneliness (Weiss, 1973, p. 18). We also identify the aspects of loneliness that emanate from cultural discrepancies. By that, we recognize that loneliness is better understood when cross-

cultural differences are considered along with social and emotional dimensions (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

Emotional loneliness is the absence of a close, intimate attachment figure, such as a spouse (Russell et al., 1984). This type of loneliness comprises family and romantic loneliness (DiTommaso, Brannen & Best, 2004). It leads to a feeling of emptiness; an intense longing for acceptance (Roos & Klopper, 2010), restlessness, apprehension, nameless fear, and deprivation of sleep (Weiss, 1973). *Social loneliness* connotes a lack of social networks or relationships and can be caused by a lack of support from family members or friends (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010). Often, social loneliness is a subjective assessment of an individual's quality and quantity of social networks (Bofill, 2004) and how these networks interact with the individual. Social loneliness is often identified by the feeling of boredom, exclusion, depression, meaninglessness, and marginality (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010).

Although the terms "loneliness" and "social isolation" are sometimes used interchangeably, the distinction between both concepts has become more apparent recently (Kadowaki & Wister, 2022; Wigfield et al., 2020). As synthesized by a recent review, *social isolation* is an objective report or observation of being physically alone, resulting from having fewer social contacts (Kadowaki & Wister, 2022). Specifically, Wigfield et al. (2020) differentiated loneliness and social isolation along six major lines, namely: objectivity versus subjectivity, quality and quantity, actual and desired social contacts, perception of the term, voluntary versus involuntary intention, duration of the condition, and negative versus not negative (p. 4) (see Ojembe, 2022 for an expanded discussion). However, several lines of evidence suggest that risk factors for loneliness and social isolation differ but can be equally somewhat inter-related (Drennan et al., 2008; Heylen, 2010; Teater et al., 2021).

Evidence focusing on the risk factors for loneliness among older adults as both a homogenous and a heterogenous entity abounds. Loneliness among older adults as a homogenous group has been linked to different factors (Dahlberg, McKee, Frank, & Naseer, 2021), including personal, social, and cultural factors (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015), racially specific demographical factors (Taylor, 2019), unfulfilling social relationships (Hawkley & Kocherginsky, 2018), and migration-related factors (Koehn, Ferrer, & Brotman, 2020), among many others. Similarly, specific studies focusing on loneliness among ethnic minoritized older adults have pointed to several personal and social factors; for example, country of birth (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015) and reduced neighbourhood social cohesion (Taylor, 2019), as significant risk factors for loneliness. Although some of these findings resonate with the studies that have been conducted among some ethnic minoritized groups in Canada (Alvi & Zaidi, 2017; de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015; Garcia Diaz, Savundranayagam, Kloseck, & Fitzsimmons, 2019), little is known about the constellating factors for loneliness, specifically among native-born and immigrant Black older adults (BOAs) in Canada, and how they navigate their experience (Ojembe et al., 2022). Here, we intend to address this gap.

Our study aims to uncover the different factors that shape the experience of loneliness among BOAs (55 years of age and older) living in Ontario. Specifically, our study was guided by the research question: *What are the constellating factors that shape the experience of loneliness among BOAs in Ontario?* Our narrative study was guided by the three-dimensional space narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We achieved this by focusing on the personal narratives of BOAs. Although these three spatiotemporal locations (time, place, and space) are usually considered

individually when exploring loneliness, we intentionally merged them as a purposeful and strategic means of exploring loneliness among ethnic minoritized and immigrant older adults. We believe that such understanding will aid in providing information that could aid in developing strategies for better supporting ethnic minoritized groups with relevant programs and services.

Interaction between Culture and Loneliness

Culture significantly determines how people experience relationships and loneliness because it contributes to forming a society's normative values and meaningful practices and perceptions (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010). Specifically, culture has been defined as an "integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, faith, or social groups" (The Child Development Institute in Pon, 2009, p. 60). This definition provides an understanding of various components of life patterns observed by different cultural groups and how they impact individuals within a given culture. For example, the preference that is given to varying relationships in diverse societies or cultures, such that in collectivist cultures, lack of interaction with family contributes more to loneliness than it does in individualistic societies, where loneliness results from a lack of interactions with friends and the existence of an attachment figure (Barreto et al., 2021; Lykes & Kemmelmeier, 2014).

There has also been some conversation around acculturation and the changing patterns of family relationships where parents have a collectivist background but raise children in individualistic cultures (Fingerman, VanderDrift, Dotterer, Birditt, & Zarit, 2011). In such societies, younger family members tend to adopt cultural practices that are drastically different from those of their older parents. There is a tendency for more focus on individualism than on collectivism, as well as weaker family ties, sometimes caused by several competing demands such as career and education. Therefore, the younger generation has less time to provide filial piety (primary duty of care) to older family members who might need it (Garcia Diaz et al., 2019; Ojembe & Kalu, 2018). Therefore, when familial relationships, strong interpersonal ties or strong bond with family members are lacking, the experiences of loneliness and a sense of abandonment among older family members can increase (Ng & Northcott, 2015).

Furthermore, there has also been some discussion around *cultural loneliness,* which has similar symptoms to social loneliness (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010). Specifically, *cultural loneliness* denotes a feeling of emptiness that arises from moving to a foreign culture, leaving one feeling misunderstood and unable to reciprocate understanding about cultural meanings and significant cultural issues in the new location (Sawir et al., 2008). For example, cultural loneliness can arise from the unavailability of cultural and language preferences. This explains why loneliness is high among immigrants who experience a language barrier when they move to a new country, city, or culture (Ojembe et al., 2023; Koehn et al., 2020). Nevertheless, studies on loneliness rarely explore cultural loneliness related to immigrant older adults, even though cultural loneliness can significantly lead to social and emotional loneliness when lack of language proficiency and exclusion hinder an individual from social integration (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010).

Evidence from North America has shown that the experience of loneliness is influenced by an individual's country of origin and cultural background (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015). For example,

among ethnic minoritized older adults in Canada, those not highly acculturated to Canadian culture had a higher rate of loneliness than those acculturated to the Canadian culture (Garcia Diaz et al., 2019). In the study by Garcia Diaz et al. (2019), only four (2.6%) Black participants were included, encumbering the understanding of how cultural expectations contribute to the specific experience of loneliness among Canadian-born and non-Canadian-born BOAs. Even though Statistics Canada reported that the population of older immigrants in Canada increased from 20 per cent in 2011 to 31 per cent in 2016, and the population of Black people has doubled within the last two decades (Kei, Seidel, Ma, & Houshmand, 2019), BOAs continue to be excluded from loneliness research (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015; Koehn et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the experience of loneliness among BOAs is warranted. Our article highlights this aspect while contributing to the discussion on loneliness among ethnic minoritized older adults in Canada.

Theoretical Approach: The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Inquiry

The three-dimensional Space Narrative Inquiry (henceforth used as the 3-D SNI) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is strongly influenced by the Deweyan Theory of Experience (Dewey, 1953), consisting of three components: *interaction, continuity,* and *situation.* Clandinin and Connelly (2000) expanded this framework to include sub-components for each component: *personal and social* (interaction); *past, present, and future* (continuity/temporality); and *place or context.* (situation) (see Figure 1). The 3-D SNI emphasizes the compartmentalization of experiences into four directions: *inward, outward, backward,* and *forward.*

Inward direction refers to the internal and personal conditions relating to our experiences, such as feelings, hope, and moral dispositions. *Outward* direction focuses on the environmental conditions that contribute to our experiences. Finally, *backward*

and *forward* directions explore temporality, locating people's experiences in the past, present, and future. Therefore, to understand an experience, one must ask questions focusing on these four directions, because the understanding of people is based on a holistic examination of their personal experiences and the interactions that they have with other actors in the environment across time or their life course in a particular place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The importance of this assertion is further enforced by the knowledge that "individual narratives of experience are embedded in social, cultural, and institutional narratives" (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 2) and not isolated.

By integrating the 3-D SNI, our study sought to understand the impact of temporal and spatial factors on the experience of loneliness among BOAs. We therefore explicitly explored the influence of cultural context, interactions, and community connections in defining the risks of loneliness among BOAs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through the lens of the continuum of the experience: present, past, and future, within the social location presently occupied by BOAs.

Methods

This study is based on the social constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2016), using a narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin, 2016). The social constructivist paradigm aims to generate an understanding of people's relatively different constructions about their world experience to achieve change. Thus, knowledge construction is based on personal experience and interpretation of the experience by the individual (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). The ontological and epistemological position of this study is predicated on the fact that there are multiple interpretations of reality, shaped by the unique experiences of the researched and researcher, thus recognizing that the degree to which older adults experience loneliness might differ by race, gender, and other demographic differences (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).
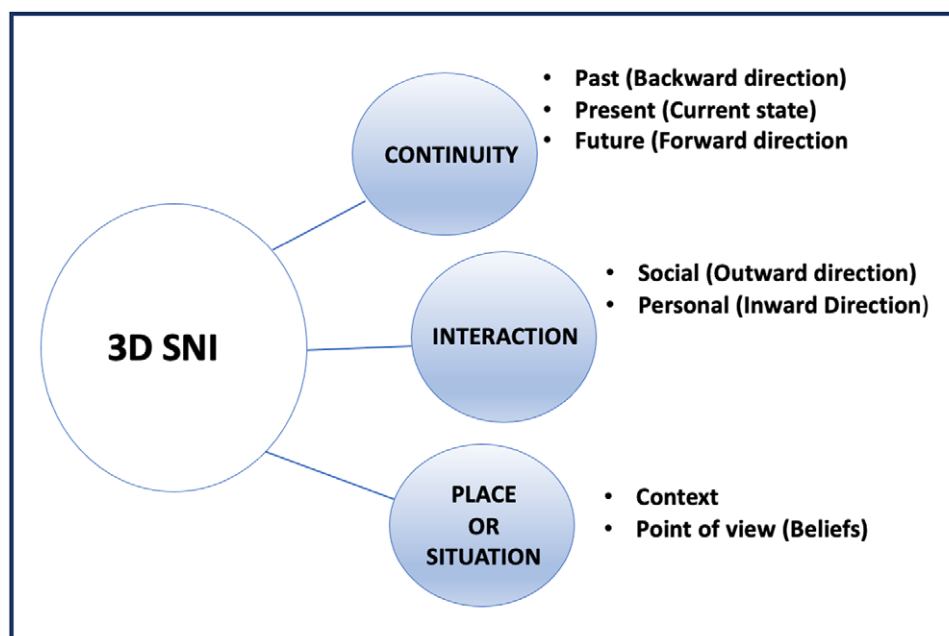
Figure 1. Three-dimensional Space Narrative Inquiry (3-D SNI) Framework adapted from Clandinin & Connelly, 2000.
This framework consists of interaction (personal and social), continuity/temporality (past, present, and future), and situation or place (context, belief, and/or point of view).

Narrative inquiry was employed as the methodological approach for this study because it emphasizes the diversion from generality to the particularity of the experience, in this case, among BOAs in Canada (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Caine, 2008). It also allows insight into how more extensive social, institutional, and cultural narratives inform our understanding of the experience of loneliness among BOAs in Canada (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

Study Design and Data Collection

Sampling/recruitment techniques

A criteria-based purposive and snowballing sampling was employed in selecting BOAs with experience of loneliness. Participants who (1) were 55 years of age and older, (2) self-identified as Black, (3) self-identified as being lonely either presently or in the past, (4) and could communicate in English or Broken or Pidgin English were invited to participate in the study. Evidence has identified a language barrier as one of the predictors of loneliness among racialized older adults in Canada (Stewart et al., 2011). The criterion-based selection was beneficial because it offered detailed information and high accuracy, especially with the relatively small number of participants used in the study. We also included snowballing technique as a recruitment strategy to enable participants and gatekeepers to refer people who met the criteria for the study (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

To ensure maximum variation in the recruitment, we purposefully recruited demographically diverse participants (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). We were attentive to variations in age, gender, geographical location, health status, education, and immigration status in our selection of participants. When we noticed that recruitment was skewed towards a particular demography, we would focus less on that aspect. For example, when we started recruitment, we initially got participants within the age range of 55–65. Therefore, to ensure that other age groups were given the opportunity to participate, we specifically requested participants within the age group of 70–90 years from our partner organizations. This was also applied to geographical regions (East Africa, West Africa, and the Caribbean), gender, and immigration status.

The study was advertised through various religious institutions and ethnic associations in Hamilton and Ontario, including the Federation of Black Canadians. The study was also announced on the Web sites and social media platforms of some social service and aging research agencies in Hamilton, including the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), the McMaster Institute of Research on Aging (MIRA), and the Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging. The aim was to recruit participants from different cities in Ontario, but only participants in Hamilton and Windsor volunteered to participate in the study. Dr. Ojembe shared the study information on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Individuals interested in participating in the study who self-identified as lonely contacted Dr. Ojembe via e-mail or phone call, and participants were screened to ensure they that met the inclusion criteria. As part of the recruitment strategy, the short form of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA-S) was used to select participants who confirmed experience of loneliness. The following questions were asked: "I am able to depend on my friends for help," "I feel part of a group of friends," "There is no one in my family (or community) I can depend on for support and encouragement, but I wish there were," "My family really cares about me," "I feel close to someone or a group" (DiTommaso, Brannen, & Best, 2004). The SELSA-S has been reported as a relevant tool for measuring loneliness in later life (DiTommaso

et al., 2004). Participants answered on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and participants who agreed to answer just one of the questions and met the other inclusion criteria were included, and interviews were scheduled. Those who did not meet the criteria were not included. We recruited 13 participants, including one for the pilot study (see participants' demographic information in Table 1 for more details). This is within the recommended sample size for narrative inquiry (Law & Chan, 2015; Nguyen & Dao, 2019). Two participants were interviewed in Broken English and one in Pidgin English by the Dr. Ojembe, who could speak and understand both Pidgin and Broken English. Dr. Ojembe transcribed these transcripts verbatim in the original language of the interview before translating them into English. The study was approved by McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB - #5476).

Data collection

Each participant was invited to participate in two interviews conducted via telephone (Lechuga, 2011) or virtually (Crichton & Kinash, 2003), depending on each participant's preference. Twenty-five interviews (12 participants gave two interviews each, and 1 participant completed only one interview) were completed. To build trust with the interviewees during narrative interview sessions, it is required that interviews be conducted more than once (Goodson & Gill, 2011). As a standard method in narrative inquiry, each interview was composed of two significant phases: the narration and the conversation phases (Kim, 2015). The advantage of this method is that it allowed us to engage further with stories told by participants and create opportunities that enabled them to direct the conversation as they wished. Before the interview date, participants were informed of the two phases, and the process was described to them.

The narration phase consisted of unstructured interviews in which participants narrated their experience of loneliness. Discussion at this phase began with questions such as, "Tell me about yourself?", "Tell me about your experience with loneliness?", "Tell me what it was like when you newly arrived in Canada?" and participants were invited to tell their stories without interruption from the interviewer. The interviewer took notes and developed probes to follow up with participants in the conversation phase. There was no stipulated time for this phase; however, participants stopped when they had exhausted their narrations.

In the conversation phase, we used a semi-structured interview guide to explore points of emphasis raised by the participants in the narration phase, alongside the notes taken during the narration phase. Participants were probed to provide more in-depth context to their stories. Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, with breaks when needed. Participation was voluntary, and participants gave spoken consent before and during the interview. Participants were given a $25 gift card after completing all of their interview session(s). All interviews were recorded digitally (with the respondent's consent). The data were transcribed verbatim, and identifiers chosen by participants were used in data coding and reporting for privacy. The interview guide was pilot tested, and the tool was revised after the pilot testing.

Data analysis

Narrative inquiry is a field characterized by extreme diversity and complexity. Hence, there is no single way to analyze narrative research, just as there is no single definition of "narrative" (Reissman, 2008). Therefore, our data was analyzed iteratively simultaneously with data collection. We followed the steps of

conducting a three-dimensional analysis (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2016).

First, the transcripts were read to provide a complete sense of the data. Second, the transcripts and field notes and the narrative concept of experience were re-read and considered through the lenses of temporality, sociality, and spatiality. In exploring temporality, we analyzed experience in past, present, and future contexts. Also, exploring socio-personal interaction allowed for the in-depth exploration of the social, cultural, and structural forces that shaped the experience of loneliness among BOAs. Finally, exploring space enabled the understanding of the influence of place on the experience of loneliness. Considering these three dimensions allowed Dr. Ojembe, who did the coding, to think inwardly and outwardly while scrutinizing the experience of loneliness.

Third, themes were developed from the categories of statements to form a narrative, while interconnections, plot lines, patterns, and tensions were identified for each participant. All the team members had a discussion on these themes and reached a consensus. Fourth, participants' stories were retold chronologically, capturing the particularities of the meaning presented by each experience narrated by the participants. The accounts were validated by participants who indicated interest during the interviews. Fifth, similarities and differences across cases were compared to elicit a chronicled picture representing the concept of experience and coping among BOAs. The comparisons continued across all transcripts until no new theme or pattern was identified, as we did not apply saturation in our coding because of our interest in the particularity of every story and narrative told by each participant. Finally, a comprehensive chronicled report that captured the narrative accounts of the participant's experiences of social and emotional loneliness was completed. The transcripts were uploaded on NVivo 12 to manage the data.

Ensuring rigour

As with other qualitative methods, narrative inquiry does not rely on reliability, validity, and generalizability (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, we ensured rigour and enhanced credibility by maintaining the triangulation of data sources. For example, while analyzing the transcripts, we referred to the memos and field notes taken to provide context to the themes identified. After "restorying" all the narratives individually, we ensured participants' validation of what was captured by sharing the written report with those who had indicated interest during interview sessions. To maintain confidentiality, only their specific information was shared with them. Finally, to further ensure the dependability of the research process, the lead author Dr. Ojembe engaged in peer-debriefing sessions with supervisors (Tracy, 2010).

Findings

The findings will be represented here in two levels. The first level introduces an overview of the background and stories of six participants (two male and four female). We chose these participants because their experiences illuminated the understanding of diverse narratives of loneliness, coping. and multiple interpretations of the experience. Their varied experiences also enriched our understanding of the interplay between the experience of loneliness and the three-dimensional narrative space. The second level provides the similarities and differences in the chronicled accounts of all 13 participants. The mean age of participants is 63.8 (see Table 1).

Participants' Portraits of Experience of Loneliness

BOALSP4 Story (West African Black) (loneliness caused by geographical relocation)

BOALSP4 is a 70-year-old man who migrated to Canada from West Africa 37 years ago as an undergraduate student, and whose experience highlights the loneliness experienced upon moving to a new country. BOALSP4 told his story chronologically, starting from when he migrated to Canada, leaving his wife and two and a half children (as he puts it) in Africa. BOALSP4 described his arrival and settling into Canada as a challenging and lonely experience. He talked about how difficult it was for him to adapt to not having and enjoying the quality of relationships he was used to have in Africa, such as having his family and relatives around. However, the absence of the relationship he desired was replaced with getting closer to God and engaging in constant praying, because it allowed him to escape from his experience of loneliness. As time went by, BOALSP4 started getting involved in church activities and making Christian friends, which reduced the severity of his loneliness.

BOALSP5 Story (Indigenous Black) (loneliness caused by identity denial)

BOALSP5 is a 66-year-old Indigenous Black woman born in Canada, whose experience of loneliness began with learning to live in denial of identity. BOALSP5 told her story in a non-linear sequence, starting with her marriage, family, bereavement, career, and childhood. She discussed her adoption by inter-racial parents (a White father and a Black mother) who did not raise her to identify with being Black.

BOALSP5 talked about the lack of adequate knowledge about her culture and heritage until she was in her 20s and 30s. She also mentioned growing up in a neighbourhood dominated mainly by White families and the implicit racism and spiteful treatment she and her adoptive parents experienced. That said, she described how her lack of awareness of what racism was back then shielded the impact of those experiences for her. In hindsight, she understands how unpleasant those experiences were and the adverse effects they had and continue to have on her present life, including battling chronic depression. However, BOALSP5 described how she is still on a continuous journey of fully discovering her identity.

BOALSP10 Story (Caribbean Black) (loneliness caused by losing significant relationships)

BOALSP10 is an 87-year-old woman who migrated to Canada from Eastern Caribbean 50 years ago to join her ex-husband to work in Canada. BOALSP10 is diagnosed with early dementia, preventing her from remembering some information, such as the full name of the first organization she worked for. BOALSP10 started her story in non-chronological order by talking about her lack of interaction with others and her experience of loneliness which was caused by living alone and losing significant relationships in life, including her marriage, son, and friends. Her description of these relationships depicted them as valuable to her. Now that they are no+ longer available, she misses the attachment, intimacy, and social provisions (relational gains) she had once received from them.

BOALSP7 Story (East African Black) (loneliness caused by lack of support as a new immigrant)

BOALSP7 is a 75-year-old woman who migrated to Canada from East Africa 48 years ago to join her (now-late) husband, who came to study in Canada. She told her story mainly chronologically,

Table 1. Demographic information of participants (*n* = 13)

Participant's Unique Study ID Number or Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Living Arrangement	Educational Level	Living with Functional Disability	Self-Rated Health	Ethnicity	No. of Years in Canada	No. of Children	No. of Interviews
BOALSPILOT1	M	58	Divorced	Living with a friend	Post-secondary	No	Good	Caribbean	More than 30 years	1	2
BOALSP1	M	56	Married	Living with a family	Graduate level	No	Poor	West African black	5 years	3	2
BOALSP2	F	55	Single	Living alone	Graduate level	No	Good	West African black	5 years	2	1
BOALSP3	F	63	Married	Living with spouse	Prefers not to say	No	Good	West African black	More than 20 years	5	2
BOALSP4	M	70	Married	Living with spouse	Post-Secondary	No	Good	West African black	37 years	5	2
BOALSP5	F	65	Widowed	Living with someone not family	Post-secondary	No	Fair	Indigenous black	Born in Canada	9	2
BOALSP6	F	65	Widowed	Living alone	No formal education	Yes	Poor	East African black	15 years	4	1
BOALSP7	F	75	Widowed	Living with a family	Graduate level	Yes	Poor	East African black	48 years	4	1
BOALSP8	F	81	Widowed	Living alone	Post-secondary	Yes	Poor	West African black	17 years	4	2
BOALSP9	F	77	Widowed	Living alone	No formal education	No	Poor	West African black	17 years	5	1
BOALSP10	F	87	Divorced	Living alone	Post-secondary	Yes	Poor	Caribbean	50 years	2	1
BOALSP11	M	64	Single	Living alone	No formal education	Yes	Poor	East African black	16 years	Not stated	1
BOALSP12	M	72	Married	Living with spouse	Post-secondary	No	Fair	West African black	40 years	Not stated	1

starting from the beautiful memories of growing up in Africa and being oblivious of racial differences as missionaries raised her. She also talked about the devastating experience of racial discrimination that she and her family were subjected to while seeking better career opportunities in Canada. She also narrated some significant changes she had witnessed in Canada over time. Specifically, BOALSP7 talked about their setbacks as new immigrants and the complex challenges they encountered to make Canada their new home, including navigating restrictive immigration policies, adapting to unfriendly neighbourhoods, and coping with a lack of social and financial support. BOALSP7 noted that staying in Canada was very lonely for her, and that even though she wished to return to Africa, she could not because her husband was in Canada, and she could not afford to take care of their children alone. Nevertheless, having lived a long time in Canada, BOALSP7 overcame the negative experiences by engaging in community social activities and supporting new immigrants.

### BOALSP8 Story (West African Black) (loneliness caused by poor health)

BOALSP8 is an 81-year-old woman who migrated to Canada as a refugee from West Africa 17 years ago because of the war in her birth country. BOALSP8 described her physical injuries during the war and how she was saved and brought to Canada as a refugee, leaving her family and children in Africa. BOALSP8 told her story in a non-linear sequence and highlighted how difficult it has been for her to live alone with a chronic back injury that prevents her from standing up or engaging with others. Although personal support workers (PSWs) come in to provide care and support for 30 minutes daily, BOALSP8 noted how she wished for more access to care, believing that it would help her interact more with people and reduce her loneliness.

BOALSP11 Story (East African Black) (loneliness caused by disability and disengagement)

BOALSP11 is a 64-year-old man who migrated to Canada as a refugee from East Africa 16 years ago because of war in his birth country. BOALSP11 is single, lives alone and has impaired vision. He narrated his story in a non-linear sequence, starting with how his disability has prevented him from working, earning income, meeting his financial needs, and actively engaging with his community as he used to do before recently experiencing difficulties with his vision, and how these experiences have contributed to his loneliness. He highlighted some of the challenges he has gone through in securing welfare provisions from the government to ease his financial strains, including delayed approval of his application for support. Finally, BOALSP11 described constantly worrying about losing his accommodations and becoming homeless. BOALSP11 was of the two participants interviewed in Broken English.

Narrative Analysis and Discussion of Loneliness within the Three-Dimensional Spaces

Our second-level analysis identified loneliness as an experience that occurs in two directions (backward and forward). The analysis demonstrates how loneliness among BOAs is influenced by location: involvement in diverse social activities and interactions happening across *time* and *place*. Three narrative threads (themes) were identified from the chronicled accounts of all participants included in this article: *time as a driver of change, sense of belonging reinforced through place identity, and challenges of making a new*
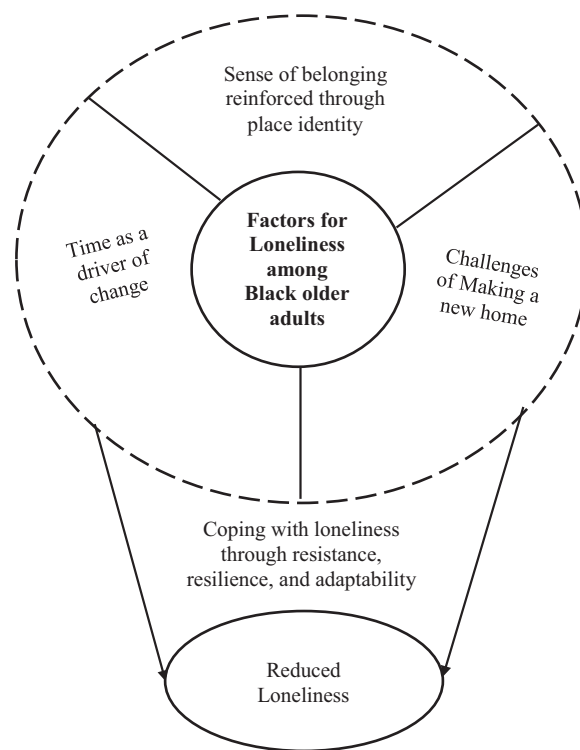
Figure 2. Schematic representation of the model of coping with loneliness among BOAs across the three-dimensional spaces. Black older adults' experiences of loneliness are shaped through the interaction of three spatiotemporal concepts, including *time* and *place identity* reinforced by the sense of belonging and leading to *making a new home*. Across these three spatiotemporal locations, BOAs grapple with complex interlocking systems of oppressions that contribute to their experience of loneliness. However, many BOAs cope with loneliness through acts of resistance, resilience, and adaptability.

home (see Figure 2). There are sub-themes, patterns, and tensions that provide context to participants' narratives within these themes (see Table 2)

Time as a Driver of Change

Time as a driver of change portrays the negative and positive transitions and their contribution to the experience of loneliness among BOAs. Temporality or time is universally assumed to have a linear progression. However, the form we consider in this article is conscious time (i.e., the subjective qualification of time by the observer) (Andrews, 2021). This sense of time is subjectively experienced and is presented by some of our participants as non-linear and continuous, and can progress in any direction: chronologically and non-chronologically. Participants talked about their experience of loneliness as shaped by significant changes that they have experienced and witnessed, locating them in different time spaces (past, present, future) (Clandinin, 2016).

Changes in health conditions

Our participants perceived time as a concept, or something not encountered in isolation. They associated time with other events, such as health conditions that they had experienced across their life course, some of which were unwelcome. For example, BOALSP11 and BOALSP10 talked about how their excellent health suddenly changed to the point where the former could not see anymore, and the latter could not remember some essential things from her past,

Table 2. Representation of second-level analysis

Thematic Representation of Second Level Analysis	Patterns and Tensions in Narrations
1) Time as a driver of change a) Generational differences b) Technological divide c) Timing of migration	• BOAs face multi-layered exclusions contributing to loneliness • BOAs learn to cope by adapting • Access improves with time • Some geographical locations facilitate more access for BOAs • The experience differs by gender

2) Sense of belonging reinforced through place identity
 a) Place identity and sense of belonging
 b) Facilitators of a sense of place identity and belonging
  • Proximity to people from the same culture or race
  • Feeling accepted
 c) Barriers to a sense of place identity and belonging
  • Conflicting cultural practice
  • Cultural intolerance
  • Identity denial	

3) Challenges of making a new home a) Separating, abandoning, and leaving everyone behind	

such as places where she had been and worked. The transition from good to poor self-rated health reveals how events experienced by participants are shaped by time and how these changes can lead to social disconnection (Ojembe & Kalu, 2019).

> …I do everything well before. Now, I cannot see very very well again. I no fit do things again. E hard for oo and cause me loneliness (Translated)
> …I used to do everything well, but I cannot see clearly now. I am not able to do things… That makes it more difficult for me and makes me to be lonelier. (BOALSP11, 64 years, male)
> When I was young, I would take the bus and go to Toronto anytime I wanted…I was driving… But I can't do that now. I can't do that again because I forget sometimes. (BOALSP11, 87 years, female)

Generational differences

Participants' narratives revealed how time and generational differences have contributed to changes in patterns of social relationships with children and friends, specifically leading to weakening social relationships. Common contributory factors for this change include the age difference, which sometimes creates a generational gap (Ojembe & Kalu, 2019). Others reveal the influence of changes in preferences or values on loneliness. A typical example is that the younger generation are more career and technology focused than their parents, who are more focused on building and sustaining family relationships.

> I will say time and age …Maybe because I'm old now, everybody is saying live your life alone and leave everybody alone. When I was younger, I had more friends and companions… but as I got older, everybody stays on their own…now friendships are no longer what they used to be. The quality of relationships that people have is disturbing… It's sad, and you end up being lonelier. (BOALSP10, 87 years, female)
> …This generation is fast paced… their way of thinking and their way of living is totally different. It's a different generation…They don't have the time to sit with us…They don't have time to work with us using a cane. They don't have time to push us in a wheelchair. They rather pay someone $1,000 to push Mom and Dad in a wheelchair….So, the time has changed. And it means I have to now live in the time and get connected to the time. (BOALSPILOT, 58 years, Male)

Timing of migration

The amount of time since moving to Canada also played a significant role in BOAs' experience of loneliness. Time allows BOAs to adapt, learn English, and build their social network (Koehn et al., 2020). This was easier for BOAs who have spent over 30 years in Canada than those who have spent less time in Canada. In addition, the passage of time allowed some BOAs to transition from a significant state of loneliness to a point where loneliness is drastically reduced or eliminated.

> During the early days when I newly arrived… in this country, I had a setback… I didn't know my left or right…Then I didn't know who was who… My English was not very good…I was totally alone…So, they sent me to St. Clair College to learn English, and that helped me not to feel too alone. But now, it's better than ever before… I have people that I can depend on… I have some friends in our group, and they are always there for me. (BOALSP8, 81 years, female)

Some participants recounted how the desire to remain relevant community members pushed them into building capacity, even with technology usage. This enabled them to transition from feeling defeated to building resilience, as shown in their approaches to the challenges they faced over time. Resilience enabled BOAs' adaptability to the challenges they encountered across their life course, thus increasing their opportunity for more access to things, people, and resources, and reducing their experience of loneliness. This allowed them to have a more meaningful and improved quality of life in the present.

> … we have to meet up with our kids. That's why many of us are on social media …, so it's not like we can catch up with them… they are always a step ahead of us… But we can at least try to experience what they are experiencing so we do not lose relevance. (BOALSP2, 55years, Female)

Sense of Belonging Reinforced through Place Identity

This dimension highlights how place, as a socio-spatial phenomenon, can shape the experiences of social exclusion and loneliness. In addition, it uncovers how cultural differences can contribute to the experience of loneliness among immigrants. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), *place* comprises the social, cultural, and institutional contexts embedded in an individual's experience, primarily because people's narratives of experience are situated in a particular context and not isolated. Within our data, narratives of place centered on the geographical environment, neighbourhood characteristics, place-based cultures and practices, and a sense of belonging (Walsh, Scharf, & Keating, 2017). Hence, understanding the significance of place in our participants' accounts enabled us to

understand BOAs' experience of loneliness better. Some of the themes that our participants used to describe their experience of loneliness while navigating the "White" space (living in Canada as a racialized immigrant) include: place identity and sense of belonging, and barriers to and facilitators of a sense of place identity and belonging.

Place identity and sense of belonging

The experience of loneliness among BOAs differs by geographical location, both for the Canadian born and the foreign born. Participants' narratives illustrated the significance of having a sense of belonging and place identity as a member of a particular community, which is sometimes unattainable because of some undesirable community or neighbourhood characteristics. For example, BOALSP7's narration of her experience in different places that she has lived in Canada highlights how individuals who feel part of a community have an increased sense of identity with their community, as captured by the following quote.

> We stayed in Edmonton for three years. My experience in Edmonton was the best one. It felt like home to me. More like what I was used to in Africa, I had a wonderful experience, though I was not working or doing anything. It was so different from what I experienced in Kingston… my experience in Kingston, Ontario, was lonesome. (BOALSP8, 75years, female)

Some of the participants also suggested that the effort to build a place identity is the responsibility of everyone, because by creating an enabling environment, the community members commit to helping immigrants and newcomers feel comfortable and eliminate loneliness.

> But here in Canada, I'm sorry, it's a melting pot; there is "no we do it this way". You invited all of these nations to come in. So, you've got to give them what they want to be comfortable in their new country. (BOALSP5, 66years, Female)
> …We had just moved to a small house in a very quiet community. It was a safe place to raise children, but it made my loneliness worse… the neighbours didn't help… It's good in a way that everybody minds their own business, but if we all say hi, hello and have a 2-second chat, does that not help us feel like a part of the community or neighbourhood? (BOALSP3, 63 years, female)

Facilitators of a Sense of Place Identity and Belonging

Two narratives were more prevalent while discussing the facilitators of a sense of place identity and belonging: proximity to people from the same culture and feeling accepted. Participants noted that these factors reinforced their access to things and collective identity.

Proximity to people from the same culture or race

Our data showed that living in a more ethnically dense community increased a sense of belonging and place identity for BOAs. BOAs in more ethnically dense communities or locations reported feeling less lonely (Tseng, Walton, Handorf, & Fang, 2021). In this sense, access and proximity to cultural identity become crucial determinants of loneliness or not (Sawir et al., 2008). In essence, place of residence matters less to BOAs when they reside closer to people of similar cultural backgrounds. However, when this social contact is unavailable for BOAs, place of residence becomes a key factor for feeling lonely; thus, adaptation for BOAs becomes challenging.

> …seeing people from Africa and other Black people when I came to this city helped me so much. I did not feel like I had nobody. (BOALSP11, 64 years, male)
> …we met all kinds of African people in Edmonton. That was the first time I met Nigeria, Ghanaians, and people from different parts of Africa and the West Indies …It was nice, and I made friends in the church. Everybody was nice …every week, they took us to a different place, made us feel at home, and we had a wonderful experience…but I had to move downtown. I had to move downtown because I usually have a very challenging and difficult pregnancy and to be close to things. That became a lonely experience for me again. (BOALSP8, 75 years, female)

Specifically, some BOAs who initially experienced ill-treatment when they newly arrived in some cities in Canada were surprised to receive better treatment that provided a sense of belonging when they moved to a different location, city, or province within Canada. In essence, receiving poor treatment as a new immigrant led to a lingering lack of trust, especially for those who have remained in the same city since they arrived in Canada.

> …they had formed a group to support and work with each other, which was surprising. We even got a small room at the University of Alberta, where we were renting. (BOALSP8, 75 years, female)

Feeling accepted

As narrated by the participants, acceptance refers to being open to other cultural practices and receiving diverging ways of thinking, and engaging in activities without any judgment or prejudice. In addition, the narrative of acceptance refers to any treatment or general attitude of community members observed or perceived to make one feel welcomed, valued, and safe.

> … I can tell you or another Black woman or man my feelings, and they can acknowledge me safely without feeling judged. (BOALSP5, 66 years, female)
> It also depends on the culture of your neighbourhood. Some neighbourhood is more welcoming and accepting than others. Others would make you feel so out of place and unwanted. You see this in the way that people look at you, relate with you, and even avoid you when you come out to the community. I experienced it in some small communities where we have lived in the past. (BOALSP4, 70 years, male)

Barriers to a Sense of Place Identity and Belonging

While narrating the obstacles to developing a sense of place identity and belonging, participants talked about conflicting cultural practices, cultural intolerance, and identity denial. For example, BOALSP7 compared her experience to her previous experience growing up in Africa.

> My experience in England and Canada made me realize that Black people are not accepted. That was different from my experience growing up because I was taught and made to believe there is no difference between Black and White. I played with the White man's son in Africa, and there was no issue. Most of the time, the father took me to school with his son. So, I didn't have a vision of racism and discrimination. In my mind, everything was good. (BOALSP8, 75 years, female)

Conflicting cultural practices

Participants talked about grappling with conflictual cultural expectations and how the Canadian culture differs from many cultures

that they were accustomed to before arriving in Canada. In this sense, people's culturally unique expectations contribute to loneliness (van Staden & Coetzee, 2010), especially when they are newly relocated (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015). Furthermore, participants narrated the cultural conflict related to caregiving and relational patterns across different locations, especially regarding availability for and accessibility to each other. Thus, when BOAs arrive in Canada with their preconceived perception of a collectivist orientation where communal living is more prominent but instead meet a different society where individuality is paramount, their loneliness tends to increase. However, this is largely reduced when they learn to adapt and accept other cultures within their diverse communities. In essence, culture, as observed in this study, is a key determinant of the existence of loneliness or the absence of it.

> Some culture makes people feel lonely. Like in Canada, when you get old, your children will go and keep you in a nursing home and leave you there… But in Africa, where I come from, when you get older, you will live with your daughter and her family. You are never left alone to suffer loneliness. They take care of you, and they talk with you…But here, it's only you in the house, only you every time. It is very bad…They say they want to respect your privacy, but it leads to loneliness. It's different from our African culture. In Africa, we have more time for each other, but here, they are too busy for each other. (BOALSP8, 81 years female)
> Black people live a communal life. You understand…But the culture here teaches you to be on your own and book an appointment for everything. And you must adapt. (BOALSP4, 70 years male)

Cultural intolerance

Participants raised the issue of collective involvement in addressing cultural narrow-mindedness (Freitag & Rapp, 2013) and negative attitudes towards immigrants or people of other cultures caused by a lack of understanding of other groups. For example, BOALSP7 stated, "People don't understand us, and people don't want to take time to study us." BOAs noted that these undesirable attitudes, such as rejection of other people's food, way of dressing, language, and names, hinder the adaptability of both the society and BOAs and lead to cultural extinction. This points to how adaptation and cultural tolerance can sustain cultural differences and reduce loneliness among older adults, especially in a multicultural society like Canada.

> As a Black community, we must be careful because if we only cater to our culture, we will be in danger of going extinct. Because if we are dead, everything dies, and the culture dies. (BOALSPILOT, 58 years, male)
> …so, we must learn to accept other cultures different from the ones we are used to. That is one way we can help ourselves associate more with others and avail ourselves of loneliness. And this is not just for our community; everyone must get involved irrespective of whether they are Black or not. (BOALSP4, 70 years, male)

Identity denial

Participants talked about how identity denial can make them feel invisible, and about their struggle to change the narratives and correct the negative assumptions others hold of them. This identity denial can sometimes be witnessed in marriage and association with other racial groups in different spaces. For example, BOALSP5 talked about her adoptive parents' struggles in countering identity denial.

> …um yeah, it was hard, and my adoptive parents had it quite difficult. I mean, you love whom you love, and they had a rough time being an interracial couple. But as I said, we lived in predominantly White neighbourhoods and looking back, that was difficult, and it did deny me knowing who I was…And when you carry that in… it adds to loneliness because you're not understood; and you're isolated, you know. And having those desires or characteristics and not having anywhere to display them or to have them valued, or to be made aware of why you feel and see the things you like. It's just, it's really sad… (BOALSP5, 66 years, female)

Some participants also talked about identity denial that implicitly or explicitly pressures them to accept changing colour codes (behaving or talking in a more popularly acceptable manner) and how it denies BOAs their identity. Participants believe these behaviours reinforce racial discrimination and force BOAs to fit into the normative cultural structures that implicitly cause racialized and minoritized groups to adapt to popular culture, irrespective of the consequence.

> When you are in a different zone, you pick up the right code…you learn how to switch codes. Someone like me can adjust because I have been here longer. It's like I'm shifting code. I will be like, "Okay, I'm in the White zone now."…As a Black woman living in Canada, switching between the Black and White codes happens naturally to me because society expects you to…Like how you must greet and interact with someone who is not Black courteously. (BOALSP3, 64 years, female)
> But it is because we're not encouraged to be Black; we never have. Being Black was always, you know, the minoritized or a negative thing, so we were always encouraged to act better, Whiter, proper, and now it's so embedded and instilled in a lot of our people that they don't see their value and the value of their culture. (BOALSP5, 66 years, female)

Challenges of Making a New Home

Moving geographically to a new country or city is a transition that involves losing established networks and having to navigate the challenges of building new ones and making a new home. Many participants in our study recounted their challenges in making a new home and developing meaningful connections when they arrived to Canada as new immigrants. One significant point that was predominant among the stories told by the participants was the reason for their migration to Canada. For most of the participants in our study, depending on their age, some reasons for moving include displacement by war, violence, family reunification, change in social mobility, career stability, and educational purpose. For example, whereas those in their 70s and 80s sought physical safety and family unification, for those in their 50s and recently migrated to Canada, it was more about upward social mobility and choosing places that would offer them the environment to achieve this. This has been described as the push-pull factor or, better still, determinant for migration which drives the decision to stay or move (Simpson, 2022). As captured by the conversation between BOALSP7 and her late husband: "I asked myself and my late husband why we came to Canada, he said that he's been told it's a good place with good opportunities and would bring good experience." However, the possibility of BOAs achieving their desired upward social mobility, as uncovered by the data, remains far from actualization, as many BOAs who are foreign born reported facing numerous career and policy roadblocks (Koehn et al., 2020).

In addition, our data showed that for most foreign-born BOAs, moving to and settling in Canada were highly challenging because of the guilt and loneliness that resulted from separating, abandoning, and leaving everyone behind in their country of origin. Regardless of the reason for moving to Canada, all the participants expressed a sense of losing relationships with the people they left behind in their countries of birth, which increased their experience of loneliness. For example, for BOAs who came to Canada in their later life, the decision to move is accompanied by a sense of abandonment of their family back home. Conversely, for those that arrived in Canada in their early life, moving or leaving their home country often leads to disconnection or loss of relationship with their spouse, children, parents, and siblings. This demonstrates how making a new home negatively affects BOAs in different ways.

> During the war, I sustained many injuries on my back which is why I ran away from Africa and came to America… I feel bad for separating and staying away from my kids. This one staying there and that one staying there…Anytime I remember the fight back home, I'm scared to go…I am tired of this loneliness… I am not young anymore… and I don't want to die in a different land. (BOALSP8, 81 years, female)
>
> …Till now, we don't know where our parents were buried (talking about his and his wife's parents). We do think of it, and it is a painful thing. But it is part of the experience of living in a foreign land. You just leave; and are separated from your loved ones, but we do not wish to abandon them, you know; we just learn to live with it. (BOALSP4, 70 years, male)

Our findings showed an overlap among the three narrative spaces: time, place, and interactions. Specifically, our results highlight how power dynamics and complex marginalization experienced by BOAs throughout their life course deprives them of their identity and affects their sense of home and belonging, immensely contributing to their unique experience of loneliness. Inherent in the narrative of contributory factors for loneliness among BOAs are their processes of navigating, integrating, and coping with loneliness. BOAs showed coping through resistance, resilience, and adaptability, which afforded them access to meaningful social connections, interactions, and overall mitigation of loneliness. However, this article has not discussed the detailed processes through which BOAs cope with loneliness. This is an area requiring further research.

Discussion and Implications

To our knowledge, this is the first study to specifically explore loneliness among BOAs in Canada, understanding how their experience of loneliness is enforced in time and place and by their ability to make a new home. We completed our analysis in two phases focusing on specific factors contributing to six individuals' unique experiences of loneliness and the similarities and differences in the chronicled accounts of all 13 participants. Detailed findings from our study show that loneliness among BOAs is experienced alongside a complex overlap of temporality, relationality, and spatiality. In addition, for some BOAs, our findings reveal that loneliness is caused by geographical relocation, identity denial, losing significant relationships, lack of support as a new immigrant, poor health, disability, and social disengagement. Collectively, three dominant themes with sub-themes uncovering different constellating factors contributing to loneliness among BOAs were identified from our data analysis: time as a driver of change, sense of belonging reinforced through place identity, and challenges of making a new home. However, this section will highlight the key findings identified across the data and describe their implication for research, policy, and practice.

First, tying our findings back to the three-dimensions space narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016), our findings show that experiences of loneliness among BOAs are generally fluid, heterogeneous, and shaped by diverse constellating factors, resonating with previous research in this area of study (Ojembe et al., 2022). Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that the experience of loneliness among BOAs differs across time, place, and the situational context of the individuals, such as relationships and social interaction.

On the subject of temporality, this article presents how change over time leads to marginalization and multidimensional exclusion of BOAs. The findings also highlight how this change disrupts BOAs' patterns of doing things, including involvement in social relationships and integrating into their new country, causing them to experience loneliness. In addition, the significance of migration timing or the time spent in their new country for BOAs highlights another implication of time in their experience of loneliness. Notably, it shows that time is not just a commodity that divides the haves and the have-nots but that it also alleviates the struggle that BOAs face as new immigrants and their ability to support others in their community. This is usually the case many years after migration, and after a sense of identity and belonging has been established, although at the very high price of the embodiment of social inequities and deprivation (Koehn et al., 2020). This experience differs for BOAs who arrived in Canada as seniors within the last 5 years. In this sense, time becomes a divide between those who have stayed in Canada for over 10 years and those still trying to find their footing. In essence, time informs a sense of integration, shaping the intensity of loneliness for different groups of BOAs.

Second, viewed from a cultural loneliness lens, our findings further demonstrate how living in a culturally diverse but an unfriendly neighbourhood can deprive BOAs of their self-worth and a sense of belonging and place identity. Cultural loneliness also underscores the significance of cultural identity as a crucial element that determines the extent to which interaction, sense of belonging, integration, and building a meaningful relationship can promote a sense of home among immigrant BOAs (Sawir et al., 2008). Our data show that living in places where BOAs do not feel accepted or wanted sustains a sense of emptiness. It creates an "outsider–insider" feeling, exacerbating their experience of loneliness when an already underlying guilt accompanies leaving one's country of birth (Salma & Salami, 2020). Therefore, for participants who fall into this category, home is always where the heart is, resonating with previous evidence (Liu & Gallois, 2021). This opens a discussion on the level of tolerance, empathy, and reception that new immigrants receive from their new communities and the need to specifically address the impact of social and racial discrimination, marginalization, injustice, anti-Black racism, and inequities that racialized new immigrants face as they navigate their way in Canada both on an individual and on a community level (Koehn et al., 2020).

Third, as an antidote to the impact of traumatizing experiences that Black and other racialized older adults encounter as new immigrants to Canada, our findings uncover how proximity to people of the same ethnic and racial affiliation enforces place identity. Therefore, even when older newcomers face multi-layered exclusion (Walsh et al., 2017), seeing someone of the same ethnic background alleviates the feeling of loneliness and minimizes the experience of racism, discrimination, and ageism. Therefore, although it is significant for racialized older adults to live in more

ethnically dense communities where they are more likely to receive social support from community members (Tseng et al., 2021), it is also imperative to have initiatives that increase a sense of commitment in host community members to help new immigrants have a sense of belonging. For example, social workers and program developers in Ontario can design a mentoring program in which community members can volunteer to help new older racialized and ethnic minoritized immigrants navigate their new communities. Such programs have been reported to be effective in increasing a sense of belonging and connection among new immigrant youth in Ontario, Canada and should be replicated among older immigrants. (Pryce, Kelly, & Lawinger, 2019).

Fourth, contrary to our preconceived assumption that only immigrants might experience a lack of belonging and identity, our findings further demonstrate that foreign-born and Canadian-born BOAs shared this experience across their life course, mainly those raised in inter-racial families. The complexities of these experiences highlight the compounding roadblocks that BOAs face because of the intersection of race, age, and immigration. The challenges with ageism, racism, anti-Black racism, and racialization encountered by BOAs across their life course have been described as a "double jeopardy," contributing to loneliness (Chatters, Taylor, & Taylor, 2020:854). Consequently, the internalization of these injustices by BOAs creates a false sense of belonging and identity, undermines agency, and compounds the challenges that BOAs living in Ontario have to navigate, ultimately preventing them from adequate social integration and contributing to their overall experience of loneliness. Therefore, the concerns raised in this article validate and add to numerous calls to action to address implicit and explicit institutional, structural, and cultural racism and the marginalization of people of colour, with greater attention needing to be paid to promoting multiculturalism, representation, diversity, equity, and inclusion in research, policy, and practice (Hyman, Meinhard, & Shields, 2011; Koehn et al., 2020).

Finally, the similarities of the experience narrated by many participants demonstrate the need to develop a more integrative approach that looks beyond just addressing the personal factors contributing to loneliness among racialized and immigrant older adults. Rather, interventions should consider external social factors that exacerbate the experience of loneliness among BOAs and other racialized older immigrants and the possibilities of addressing the need on a group or community level. For example, the first priority could start by examining how existing settlement services or programs for newcomers in Ontario and wider Canada adequately address the unmet needs of racialized older immigrants by designing programs that address the unique needs of this group rather than restricting them to already existing programs. This would help address the illusion of having a dream for a better life in Canada that BOAs find difficult to actualize because of the multi-layered discriminating experiences they are subjected to across their life course, which contribute to loneliness. Existing studies have reported the lack of adequate inclusion of older ethnic minoritized and racialized immigrants in existing services and programs in Canada (Garcia Diaz et al., 2019; Koehn et al., 2020). Even when there is an attempt to include them, it is usually within the limit of what already exists. Thus, a plethora of studies have criticized the practice of a one-size-fits-all approach in program design in different aspects (Koehn et al., 2020; Ojembe et al., 2023; Salma & Salami, 2020). This highlights the need for equitable distribution of resources that will prioritize the inclusion and representation of BOAs, and other racialized older immigrants in Canada.

Recommendations

First, for future research, we recommend that researchers interested in investigating loneliness among ethnic minoritized older adults consider moving away from the current approach that seems to exclude and make the experience of BOAs invisible within the loneliness literature. Therefore, there is a need for more diverse samples and studies that not only focus on the experiences of older adults as members of a particular group but also look at the similarities and differences of experience within and across groups. This calls for intensified attention to race in aging and gerontological research to achieve equal representation of all groups in future research.

Second, previous studies tend to present loneliness as primarily a factor of reduced social connection. On the contrary, as reported by BOAs, there are constellating factors exacerbating their experience of loneliness other than just lack of social connection. Therefore, we advocate that future studies on loneliness should consider exploring these factors and how members of respective ethnic groups experience loneliness and finding ways to address them. It is our position that the inability to consider this encumbers the effective structuring of programs by cultural or racial needs, hence the lingering use of a one-size-fits-all approach in programs instead of making them culturally relevant and appropriate.

Third, researchers invested in studying loneliness among immigrant, racialized, and ethnic minoritized older adults should pay attention to adopting an integrative theoretical lens that looks beyond time and place when investigating the experience of loneliness among immigrant older adults. Although this study cannot claim that similar findings will be uncovered among a different group, it is recommended that researchers invested in this issue further investigate the interaction of temporality, spatiality, and sociality across the life course of diverse older immigrants. Integrating these three elements in the study of loneliness might provide a more comprehensive view of theorizing and addressing loneliness among racialized immigrant older adults.

Fourth, policy makers should support policies and initiatives addressing the undesirable treatments that older immigrants receive from their communities, which negatively impacts them as community members and affects their sense of belonging and identity. Recently, there has been a political reawakening to addressing systems and practices perpetuating racism and discrimination, particularly anti-Black racism, against under-represented groups,. Examples include the emergence of policies advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion and, more recently, the Environmental Racism Act – C-230. Although this is a step in the right direction, more is still needed, especially as it relates to racialized older immigrants who are newcomers to Canada and grappling with many challenges such as racism, multi-layered discrimination, ageism, employment inequities, immigration, and integration challenges that impede their health and social well-being.

Fifth, to further buttress the point raised in the Discussion section, we suggest that settlement centres across Canada, including the Black community, should develop a mentorship program for BOAs who are new immigrants to Canada, because settlement centres are the first point of contact for new immigrants in Canada. Public-sponsored programs for new immigrants could also champion this mentorship program model in which older citizens are matched with new older immigrants. This could help new immigrant older adults build skills and learn how to navigate their new community until they can cope independently (especially those who migrated to Canada alone and have no family in Canada).

Through such a program, we believe that new immigrant older adults will be able to adapt and develop a sense of belonging.

Finally, in this study, we uncovered a close interaction among racism, ageism, interlocking systems of oppression, and BOAs' sense of identity regardless of their place of birth, and how that contributes to their experience of loneliness. Therefore, we suggest that further studies should explore this study area proffering solutions that would help improve the disproportionate inequities that contribute to identity denial and crisis among racialized and ethnic minoritized older immigrants across Canada.

Strengths and Limitations

The accounts presented in this article are not a comprehensive record of the experience of loneliness by all categories of BOAs across Canada. For example, our study included only one Canadian-born Black older adult raised by inter-racial adoptive parents, whose experience might differ from other Canadian-born participants or those not raised by inter-racial adoptive parents. However, this unique experience emphasizes the uniformity in the experience of marginalization and discrimination that BOAs grapple with, irrespective of country of birth, and the need for specific policy and program development to enhance self-identity and reduce loneliness among BOAs.

Conclusion

Through our expanded conceptual framework of loneliness shaped by three-dimensional spaces, we highlight implicit and explicit forces that contribute to the experience of loneliness among BOAs. Our findings suggest the need to consider programs, services, and policies that would address the marginalization constantly faced by BOAs, such as identity denial, racialization, and cultural intolerance. Such initiatives would aid BOAs' adaptability, integration, and access to more resources, and reduce their overall experience of loneliness. Further, more studies adopting integrative theoretical approaches are warranted for a more in-depth and holistic understanding of the experience of loneliness by marginalized and vulnerable groups.

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