



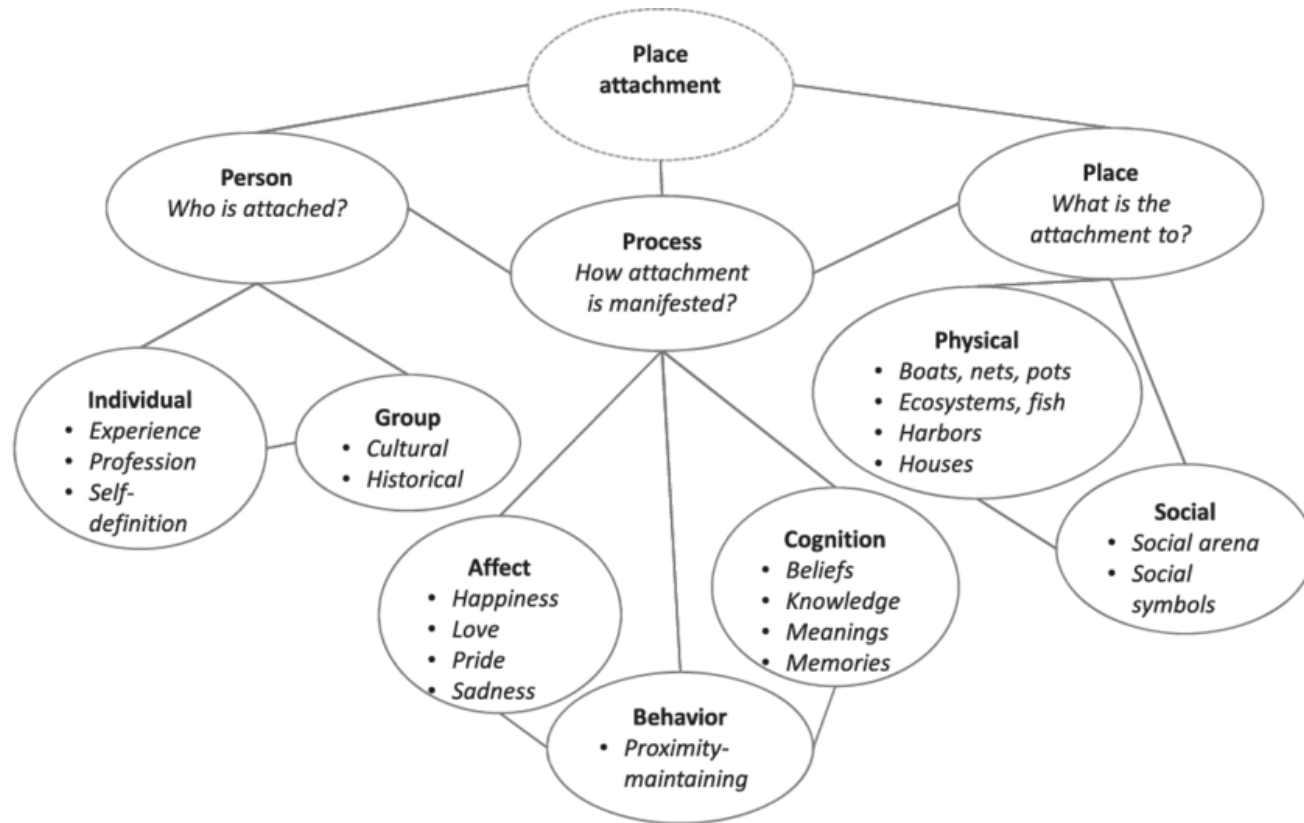
The Psychological Impact of Dark Tourism: A Scoping Review

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Place Attachment (Altman & Low, 1992)

- The emotional, affective bond that people form with meaningful places
 - Inspired by interpersonal attachment
 - Anywhere endowed with meaning by people through interaction and perceived importance (Gibbeson, 2020; Gustafason, 2014)
- But there are different ways of conceptualising PA
 - For example, some see PA as being a product of place identity and place dependence, while others see all three merging together to create someone's 'sense of place' (e.g. Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001)

Conceptualising Place Attachment: The Tripartite Model (Scannell & Gifford, 2010)



- Borne out of the need for clearer conceptualisation and to better understand this person-place bond
- Focuses on three dimensions:
 - Person – who is actually connected? This can be at an individual or group level
 - Place – the actual place in question; can cover physical aspects as well as more social too
 - Process – the psychological process that mediates the connection between person and place

Figure 1. The Tripartite Model, taken from Scannell and Gifford (2010)



BENEFITS OF ATTACHMENT

Terror Management Theory: a strong place attachment alleviates death anxiety (Chen et al., 2024)

- Linked to general happiness and psychological well-being, and overall enhanced life satisfaction/QoL (Friesinger et al., 2022; Lewicka, 2011; Zhang et al., 2022)
- Social benefits include greater social bonds, aided by higher levels of trust and lower levels of egocentricity (Lebrusan & Gomez, 2022; Lewicka, 2011)
- And other benefits include ability to form enhanced memories (informed by place), a stronger sense of comfort and security, and opportunities for personal growth (Scannell & Gifford, 2017)

The benefits of place are further emphasised when we consider what impact separation, disruption, or a complete severing of these attachments has on people (Phillips & Murphy, 2021; Zheng et al., 2019)

Expanding to Dark Places

- Research has primarily focused on 'positive' or aesthetically-pleasing places (Gibbeson, 2020; Manzo, 2014)
 - Places linked to negative events that may potentially evoke negative emotions, as well as places that don't match standard design aesthetics (and even neutral places), are rarely investigated
- Our understanding of place attachment and the impact of this person-place bond will remain limited until our connection to an array of places is explored
 - Scannell and Gifford (2017b) even argued for the need to fully explore a variety of places to enhance their model



Dark Tourism

- Visiting places associated with 'significant' death and disaster (Lennon & Foley, 1996)
 - Moved from a binary distinction to understanding places as existing along a spectrum (see Stone, 2006)
- Dark tourism is a growing practice (Iliev, 2021; Shekhar & Valeri, 2022), emphasising the need to better understand the person-place bonds
 - Does attachment/exposure to dark places differ from 'positive' places?
 - What happens at places where death (and disaster) is the focus?
- There has been a growing focus on motivations and experiences (Iliev, 2021)
 - Research has started exploring facets of place attachment (e.g. Aggarwal et al., 2024; Dandotiya et al., 2024), but research using the tripartite model is limited (e.g. Schmidt et al., 2023)

Sites of Genocide

Conflict Sites

Shrines

Resting Places

Dungeons

Exhibits

Fun Factories



Current Aim & Objectives of the PhD

The aim is to investigate both the psychological benefits and repercussions associated with dark places to extend our understanding of the interplay between people and place.

The thesis studies are being structured using the tripartite model of place attachment as a theoretical framework. Specifically, the studies included in the PhD work packages will:

- Review the current understanding and conceptualisation of dark tourism in relation to place attachment.
- Determine the psychological benefits and repercussions of places associated with dark tourism.
- Understand these psychological consequences through the application of the tripartite model of place attachment.

Study 1) Scoping Review

Q1) What psychological consequences are associated with engaging with dark places?

Q2) Do the psychological consequences vary between different types of dark places?

Q3) How does place attachment, and other place-based concepts, help to understand these psychological consequences?

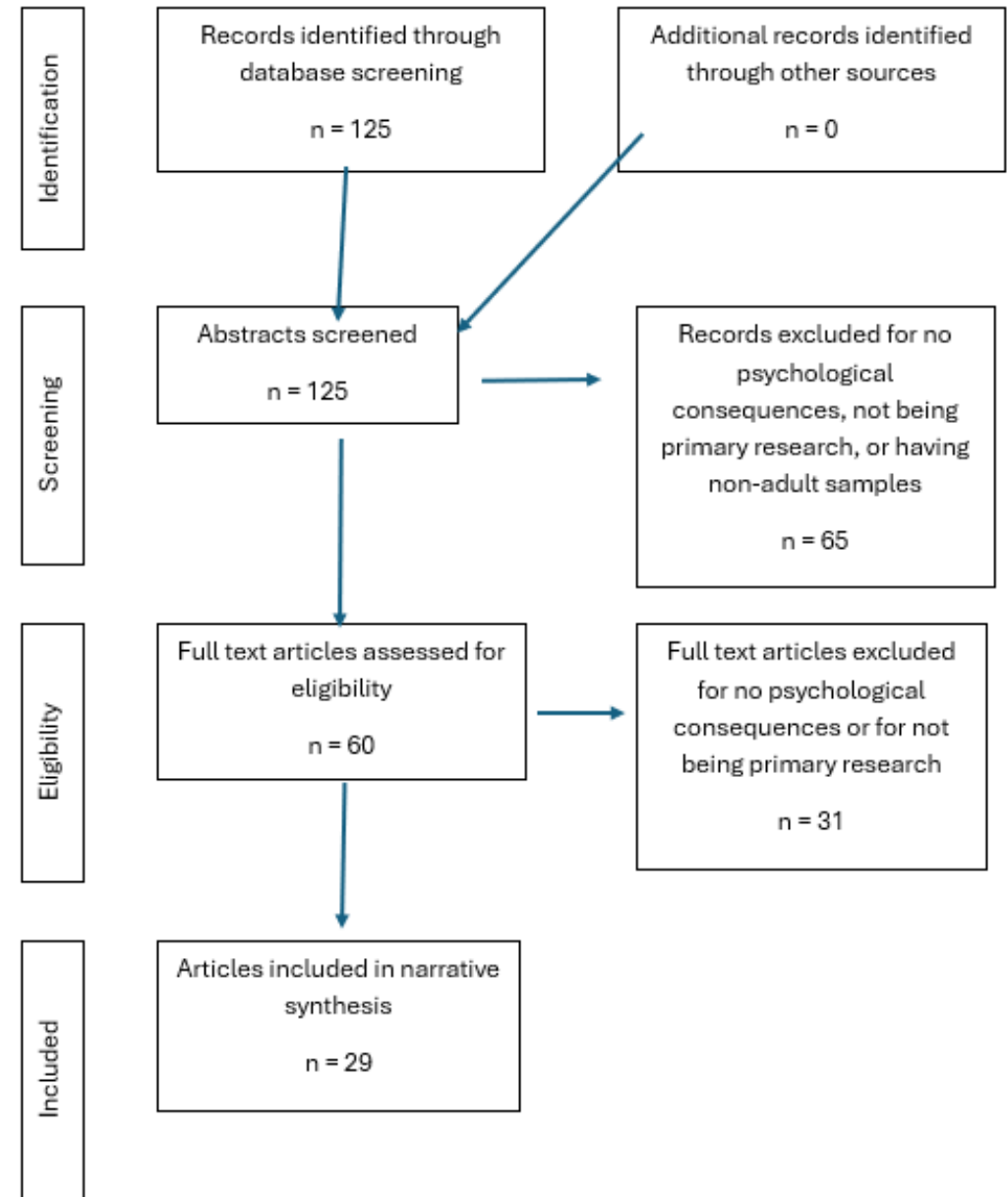


Scoping Review: Search Strategy

Dark Tourism	Psychological Consequence	Place Attachment
Dark Tourism/Place*	Quality of Life	Place Attachment
Thanatourism	Life Satisfaction	Place Identity
Grief Tourism	Affect	Place Dependence
Heritage Tourism	Belonging	Sense of Place
Black Tourism	Identity	
Abandoned Place*	Personal Growth/Transformative Experiences	
Paranormal Place*	Memory	
	Education	
	Entertainment	
	Connection to Nature	
	Resilience	
	Death Acceptance/Anxiety	

Scoping Review: Findings

- Of the 29 articles included after full-text screening, there were 33 distinct studies
- The data extraction was informed by an adapted form of the SPIDER framework, while the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) were used to collate and report the findings



— Findings: Question 1

- The experience of emotions was the most common consequence (24/33 studies)
 - As might be expected an array of negative emotions (e.g. sadness, fear, shock, horror) were reported
 - But focus was more on a dialectal experience; Sun and Lv (2025) reported an emotional journey during visits to the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre
- Followed by developing/strengthening one's sense of identity (14/33) – including religious (e.g. Blankenship, 2018), national (e.g. Dresler & Fuchs, 2021), and even human (e.g. Farkic & Kennell, 2021) identity
- The opportunity to learn and death contemplation were tied for third (five studies each) – though death anxiety was not directly assessed
- Other consequences included: enhanced wellbeing, resiliency, and memories, developing a sense of place, and stress

— Findings: Question 2

- All seven types of places (Stone, 2006) were represented in the sourced studies
 - With an added eighth type for abandoned places (e.g. Chernobyl, Marmellar Village, Varosha)
- The psychological consequences were largely spread across the different types of dark places
 - The focus on education was only apparent towards the darker end of the spectrum
 - But the dialectal experience of emotions (and the types of emotions generally) were reported across the spectrum (except at fun factories), as was death contemplation
 - Though further research would need to explore any differences more robustly

— Findings: Question 3

Person-place bonds were applied in just 7 of the 33 studies

- The Tripartite Model was not utilised explicitly
- PA was correlated with improved subjective well-being; predicting 72% of variance in visitors' happiness (Asan & Daskin, 2024)
- SoP predicted both heritage (Wang et al., 2024) and place (Qian et al., 2017) protective behaviours
 - SoP was also shown to operate as a moderating variable, increasing stress levels of visitors to an abandoned village; but only in those who believe in the paranormal (Escala-Gascon & Houran, 2021)

Other frameworks used include TMT and the Mortality Mediation Model, Social Identity Theory, and the Broaden and Build framework

— Conclusions

- Psychological consequences were, generally, similar to what we'd expect from the more typical places
- The Broaden and Build Framework: the dialectal experience of emotions allows for a growth mindset wherein people were able to embark on a meaningful journey
 - Expanding knowledge of the events and those impacted, developing a greater sense of identity, as well as being able to broach more existential issues (e.g. life, death, and what it means to be human)
- While death anxiety was not explicitly assessed, these consequences have been identified before in combating this existential dread
- Future research (i.e. study 2) needs to address these consequences further, with a more explicit application of the relevant psychological frameworks to help fully understand how and why we form bonds with different places

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