

The Psychological Impact of Dark Tourism: A Scoping Review

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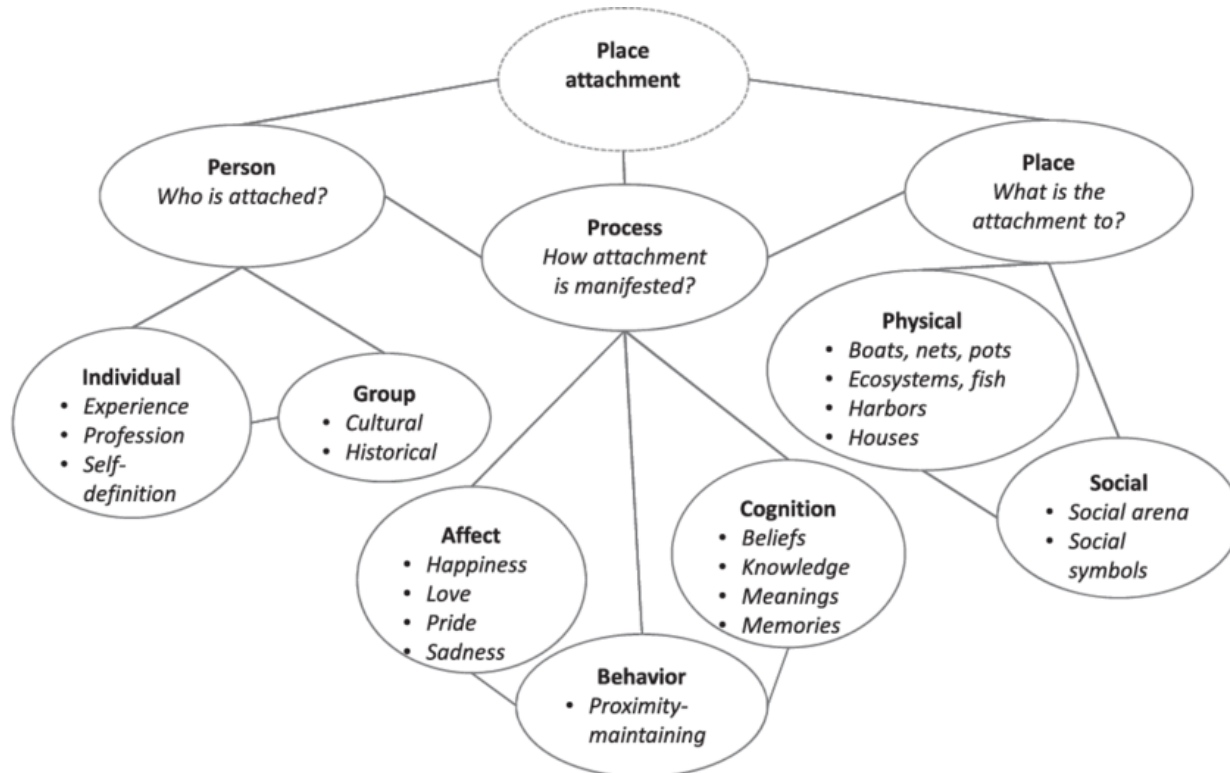
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Place Attachment

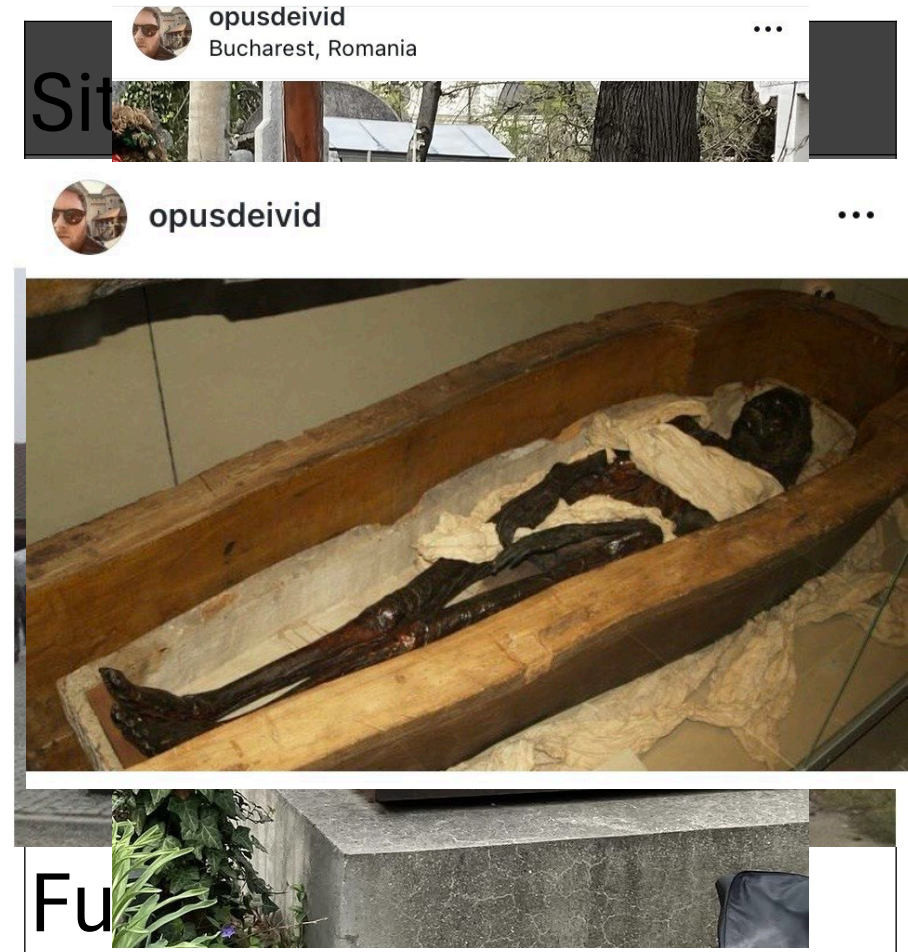
(Low & Altman, 1992)



- 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) – though there are various conceptualisations
- Benefits of a positive, intact attachment include:
 - Improved happiness and psychological well-being (e.g. Friesinger et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022)
 - Greater social bonds via higher levels of trust and lower levels of egocentricity (e.g. Lebrusan & Gomez, 2022)
 - A stronger sense of comfort and security, and opportunities for personal growth (e.g. Scannell & Gifford, 2017b)

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); need to better understand motivations/experiences, as well as the person-place bonds
 - Does attachment to dark places differ from 'positive' places?
- 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)



— Study 1) Scoping Review

Research Questions:

Q1a) What psychological consequences are associated with engaging with dark places?

Q1b) Do the psychological consequences vary between different types of dark places?

Q2) How does place attachment, and other place-based concepts, help to understand these psychological consequences?

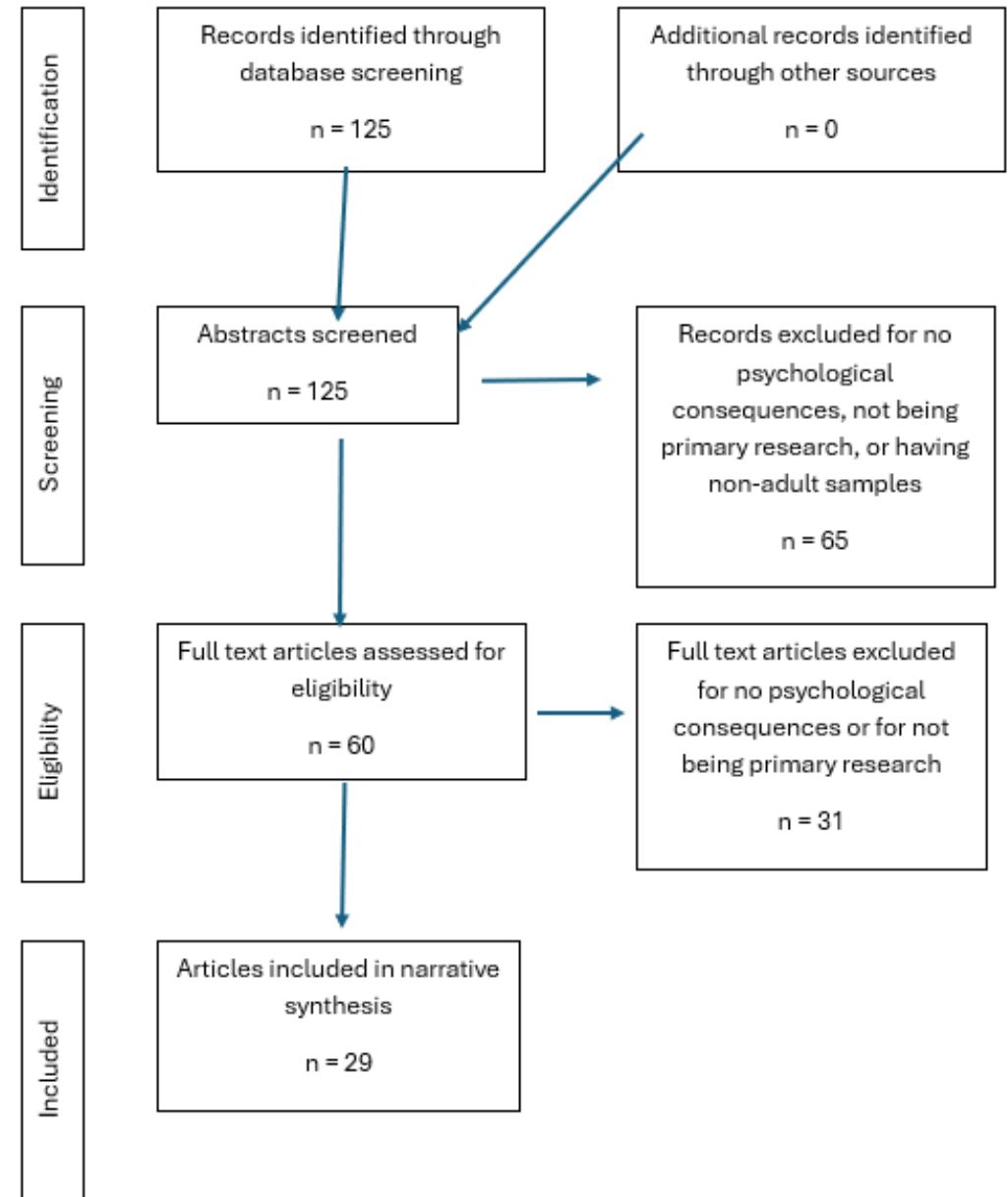


Scoping Review: Search Strategy

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: RQ1

- 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 most common consequence, though death anxiety was not directly assessed
- Additional consequences: enhanced wellbeing and resiliency, as well as developing a sense of place
 - A stress response was one of the few negative consequences reported

Question 1b: There was no apparent differences between types of dark places and the consequences reported therein

— Findings: RQ2

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 (Escola-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, the identified consequences have been previously associated with 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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