Six Feet from Fame: Exploring Dark Tourism Motivation at Marilyn Monroe's Grave

Surjeet Baidwan
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, surjeetb@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations
Part of the Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons

Repository Citation
http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations/2464

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
SIX FEET FROM FAME: EXPLORING DARK TOURIST MOTIVATION AT MARILYN MONROE’S GRAVE

By

Surjeet Singh Baidwan

Bachelor of Arts in History
University of Colorado at Boulder
1998

Master of Business Administration
Pepperdine University
2001

Juris Doctor
University of Colorado at Boulder
2002

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy - Hospitality Administration

William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 2015
Dissertation Approval

The Graduate College
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

July 22, 2015

This dissertation prepared by

Surjeet Singh Baidwan

entitled

Six Feet from Fame: Exploring Dark Tourism Motivation at Marilyn Monroe’s Grave

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy – Hospitality Administration
William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration

Bo Bernhard, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Co-Chair

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Graduate College Interim Dean

David Christianson, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Co-Chair

Robert Woods, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Lori Olafson, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

Six Feet from Fame: Exploring Dark Tourist Motivation at Marilyn Monroe’s Grave

by

Surjeet Singh Baidwan

Dr. Bo Bernhard
Professor of Hotel Management and Sociology
University of Nevada Las Vegas

This dissertation presents an empirical phenomenological study of celebrity grave tourists at the site of Marilyn Monroe's grave in Los Angeles, CA. The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature regarding the lived experience of celebrity grave tourists and their underlying motivations. This project was significant because it better explained an under-represented aspect of dark tourism by addressing the behaviors and motivations behind celebrity grave tourism. A qualitative empirical phenomenological method was employed. This approach relied upon the use of multiple in depth e-mail interviews and theme analysis. The results of the study suggested that people will seek out dark tourism when it involves an iconic celebrity who is part of larger American pop culture, which was how people perceived Marilyn Monroe. Regardless of whether or not people are fans or feel personally connected with Marilyn Monroe, visiting her gravesite can be a fascinating experience for tourists.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my entire dissertation committee – Dr. Bo Bernhard, Dr. David Christianson, Dr. Lori Olafson, and Dr. Robert Woods. I was extremely lucky to work with a committee of such a high caliber. You are all so good at what you do and I thank each and every one of you for sharing your talents with me. You inspired me to do my best and I know I am a better scholar for of it. Thank you for pushing me.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Bo Berhard, in particular – words can’t express my thanks for your patience, guidance, support, and friendship. I honestly can’t believe how much we’ve been through over these many years. Thank you for taking this journey with me and for all the things you’ve done to make sure I crossed the finish line.

I also want to acknowledge my family for a lifetime of support – particularly my wonderful parents Bali and Eva Baidwan, my older brother Balin, my younger brother Shan, his wife Tori, and my best friend and darling wife Rachel. I love you all so very much and I thank you for being a part of my life.

Lastly, to the next generation of Baidwans – my nephew Evan, my nieces Brooke and London, and my newborn son Bastille – I want you to know that anything is possible if you believe in yourself and put your mind to it. When you look at all the impressive things our very talented family has accomplished, I hope you will be as proud to be a Baidwan as I am.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. iv

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................ viii

Chapter 1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1

Purpose ........................................................................................................................... 7

Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 8

Nature of the Study .......................................................................................................... 9

Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 11

Scope and Limitations ..................................................................................................... 12

Overview of the Dissertation ......................................................................................... 13

Chapter 2 Literature Review ......................................................................................... 14

Tourism and its Subgroups ............................................................................................ 14

History of Dark Tourism ............................................................................................... 19

Modern and Postmodern Tourism ................................................................................. 32

Criticisms of Dann’s Five Possible Motivations for Dark Tourism ......................... 37

Phenomenology and Dark Tourism .............................................................................. 40

Summary ......................................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 3 Research Methods and Design .................................................................. 45

Overview ......................................................................................................................... 45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Recording</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Results</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clusters and Themes</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Textural Descriptions</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Descriptions</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textural-Structural Descriptions</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Descriptions</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Discussion</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating the Results to the Literature</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Implications</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Business</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Invitation to Participate</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form .................................................................................... 129

Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................... 129

Participants ......................................................................................................................... 129

Procedures .......................................................................................................................... 129

Benefits of Participation ..................................................................................................... 130

Risks of Participation .......................................................................................................... 130

Appendix C: Initial Interview Protocol................................................................................ 132

Appendix D: Participant Demographic Info ....................................................................... 135

References .......................................................................................................................... 140

Curriculum Vitae .................................................................................................................. 153
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Coding results for the significant first impression cluster................................. 62
Figure 2. Coding results for the connection cluster.......................................................... 64
Figure 3. Coding results for the motivation cluster......................................................... 66
Figure 4. Coding results for the preparation cluster....................................................... 68
Figure 5. Coding results for the expectations cluster..................................................... 70
Figure 6. Coding results for the actual experience cluster............................................. 72
Figure 7. Coding results for the activities cluster............................................................ 75
Figure 8. Coding results for the benefits cluster............................................................. 78
Figure 9. Coding results for the personal reflections cluster......................................... 81
Chapter 1 Introduction

A recent development in the industry of tourism is the phenomenon of “dark tourism”, first identified and labeled by Foley and Lennon (1996). Alternatively, it may also be called “thanatourism” (Stone, 2013). As opposed to conventional kinds of tourism, which may be viewed as more “positive”—in that the appeal of certain tourist attractions can be found to lie in the presence of “positive” factors such as beautiful scenery, diverse foods, opportunities for cultural enrichment, and other similar experiences—the phenomenon of dark tourism is based on the presentation and consumption by visitors of sites where death, suffering, and tragedy has famously occurred (Foley & Lennon, 1996). Tourism can be deemed “dark” through the consumption and performance of danger (Buda & McIntosh, 2013). It is in this sense that Stone (2011) has classified dark tourism as a kind of tourism that treats death, suffering, and tragedy as commodities.

While this phenomenon raises questions regarding ethical treatment, especially for those who have suffered in a specific place, it has been contended that this phenomenon is unavoidable, given that historical significance, whether positive or negative, has been found to elicit interest from tourists (Seaton, 1996). This indicates that tourists do not view the negative connotations of traumatic events—such as war—as overriding factors in their desire to visit a given place. An instance of this can be found in Bigley, Lee, Chon, and Yoon (2010), who have maintained that tragedies, such as war, can be utilized as factors that could help increase tourism in specific regions.

In an empirical study of visitor motivations of randomly-selected people who visited the former transit camp of Westerbork in the Netherlands, Isaac and Çakmak (2013) discovered that tourists named self-understanding, curiosity, conscience, a “must see this place” feeling, and
exclusiveness as primary motivating factors for their tourism. The factors revealed are perhaps best understood in terms of individual concerns. Aside from the factor of conscience, which could also be viewed as a sort of atonement for these visitors—as in a hypothetical case of a German visiting a Holocaust memorial—the motivating factors discovered by Isaac and Çakmak (2013) can be grouped under individual concerns: self-understanding, curiosity, the perceived need for visiting a place, and the feeling of exclusivity, of being one of the special few to visit a place, are all factors concerned primarily with the visitors’ personal identity. By visiting such places, tourists may feel more “in touch” with themselves and their desires.

This can also explain the existence of other kinds of tourism that, while they may be included in the general rubric of dark tourism, are markedly less somber and macabre. This includes activities such as tourism that revolves around celebrity graves and memorials. Stone (2006, p. 151) has classified such places as the “lightest” in the spectrum of dark tourism, in that these places are merely sites that have been “associated with death and suffering”, as opposed to places that are “of death and suffering”.

Visitors to such places are not just concerned with “finding themselves” as the factors above have shown. Visitors also come to such places, as Levitt (2008, p. 3) so evocatively states, as a way “of stitching oneself into the cultural past.” In contrast to the “darkest” of dark tourism, where the tourism is education-oriented, these “lightest” kinds of dark tourism are marked by an orientation towards entertainment (Stone, 2006, p. 151). As Isaac and Çakmak (2013) stated, most of the literature on visitor motivations is been based on theoretical research, as opposed to empirical data. To date, there has yet to be an empirical study on celebrity graves and the motivations of the people who visit them.
As a growing industry, dark tourism continues to remain on the fringes of tourism overall. The steps required for the industry to thrive may be different from the steps required in other kinds of tourism, necessitating a more detailed examination of the motivations of dark tourism consumers. However, before embarking on such an examination, it’s important to review ways that the study of hospitality has revealed certain insights regarding how places can attract more people.

In Whyte’s (1980) study of small urban spaces—in which cemeteries can be classified—the author claimed that what most attracts people to a given location is other people. In his study, people did not diverge from the main pedestrian flow; rather the tendency was for them to either stay in it, or move into it. He also discovered that most of the conversations being held between pedestrians could be found right in the middle of the pedestrian flow (Whyte, 1980). This indicates that people generally move towards one another in crowds, and the people who are literally in the center of things tend to be the center of attention in the crowd as well.

Another interesting revelation from Whyte’s (1980) study is the presence of food carts as an indicator of more lively social activities: food attracts more people, who then attract more people. The streets around a public space, Whyte contended, were the key space. It must be close to a busy street corner that has numerous retail stores, and, finally, the transition between that street corner and the public space must be smooth, in that pedestrians would find it difficult to discern where one ends and the other begins (Whyte, 1980). This transition helps pedestrians on a busy street corner see public spaces more easily, which would then motivate them to use it (Whyte, 1980). Movable chairs were also singled out as a prime motivator for visitors, in that people were more likely to visit places where seating was available; movable chairs were considered the best kind as they allowed visitors to sit wherever they felt most comfortable.
While applicable to public spaces generally, the question of whether these factors can influence dark tourism consumers to visit more celebrity gravesites remains to be seen.

The shift of dark tourism from the fringes of tourism toward normal tourism can be found as well in the rise of luxury hotels. In a study by Sherman (2007) of two luxury hotels, the author used participant observation in order to reveal how the luxury hotel industry works. Among her observations, one of the most ironic was the vast disparity in terms of wealth between the clients and the workers. In hotels that charge as much as $800 a night for rooms, and $3,000 for suites, the workers at the hotel Sherman studied made between ten and fifteen dollars per hour, with some tips and commissions for certain employees (Sherman, 2007, p. 2). The wealth displayed by guests was “mind-blowing” to at least one employee Sherman interviewed (2007, p.2). The questions she asked revolved around the disparity between the incomes of the guests and the workers, and how workers are able to cater to every desire of the guests, knowing that those desires would likely never be fulfilled in their case (Sherman, 2007, p.3).

Sherman (2007) argued that the economic changes in the United States led to a more service-oriented economy, which in turn has led to previous research on work becoming obsolete. For Sherman, manager-worker and client-worker relations traditionally viewed as essentially antagonistic fail to address the numerous negotiations and hierarchical relations that have emerged in the service industry, in particular ignoring unexpected alliances and reciprocities that emerge in the process.

The two main concepts that anchor Sherman’s (2007) study are consent and normalization. Rather than the classical understanding of work that relies on control versus resistance, the concept of consent includes the worker’s investment in their own skilled labor and the outcomes produced through that work; essentially, workers are able to withdraw their consent
and refuse to do a certain aspect of their work if they believe that it is demeaning (Sherman, 2007). The concept of normalization highlights the incongruity between the unequal wealth between the workers and their clients, which can explain how, despite both the workers and the clients fielding complaints about the degree of care given in luxury hotels, such feelings are framed in terms of individual feelings and do not cause group feelings that could then lead to collective awareness or action (Sherman, 2007).

As Sherman revealed, the knowledge of guests’ preferences can sometimes approach invasion of privacy. This is seen in a story she recounts about a housekeeper that often rifled through guest’s wastebaskets in order to determine their favorite things, before entering that information into a computer database that helps other workers remember guest preferences for future stays (Sherman, 2007). This movement from merely catering to a guest’s needs to attempting to predict a guest’s needs for future stays has led to a more advanced view of hospitality. It has become prevalent in certain industries to predict their guest’s desires, since some of these desires may be deemed insignificant on the part of guests and so unlikely to be asked for outright (Sherman, 2007).

Standards of hospitality have risen from just meeting guests’ needs to attempting to predict their guests’ desires (Min, Min, & Emam, 2002). However insignificant, these desires, when anticipated and met, lead to a more enjoyable experience for the guest. The reason for this proactive approach to determining what guests desired was due to the fact that guests’ desires may be perceived by themselves as insignificant or shameful, and so are rarely asked for directly; nonetheless, they are still desired at some level (Sherman, 2007). Similarly with dark tourism, some of the desires of dark tourism consumers may be self-perceived as insignificant or even shameful especially given the potentially taboo nature of dark tourism. One example might be a
desire to have tissues made available in the case of a dark tourist who is brought to tears at the grave of a stranger. Although tissue are something potentially desired, a tourist’s perception of stigma and shame at being emotional enough to weep for someone they’ve never met might make them hesitant to voice this desire. As a result, those desires might rarely be voiced out to providers of dark tourism; these consumers could simply refrain from engaging in dark tourism again rather than express seemingly irrelevant or even taboo desires. It is therefore of value for dark tourism providers to understand the factors that influence dark tourism consumers so that they may better address those desires and retain them as customers and grow the industry of dark tourism.

The gravesite of Marilyn Monroe provides an interesting backdrop for the study of this phenomenon. Despite having died over 50 years ago, she continues to be famous, both in name and in terms of facial recognition. A Google search conducted on March 10, 2014 resulted in approximately 45 million results. To put that into perspective, a Google search for “Ronald McDonald” resulted in about 29 million results, and one for her former husband, the famous baseball player Joe DiMaggio, resulted in only 6.6 million results. Marilyn Monroe also returns almost twice as many results as Drew Barrymore, an actress still currently working.

Marilyn Monroe has also been used to discuss various topics in scholarly literature. Her face has even been used for psychological studies concerned with face recognition (Tistarelli, Bicego, & Grosso, 2009). For instance, in Tanaka (2001), she was included in a roster of “famous faces”, along with George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Princess Diana: notable here is the fact that the time separating the lifetimes of Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana—who died in 1995—is more than 30 years. Her status as an icon has also been used in a case study of the interaction between race, sexuality, gender, and class in the formation process of an individual
and cultural identity (Banner, 2008). Moreover, her iconic picture, taken by Andy Warhol, continues to be discussed in studies about the connection between artistry and branding (Schroeder, 2005).

What can be seen from these facts is that Marilyn Monroe, even in death, has continued to be famous, and is often considered an icon of America (Hall, 2006). A large number of people continue to visit her gravesite each year. However, this has been taken merely as a fact, and no empirical study has been made on the reasons behind the visits of these people.

The large numbers of people who engage in this kind of dark tourism represents a largely untapped market in the field of hospitality. A majority of previous research on this phenomenon focused on the supply aspect. Farmaki (2013) claimed this is driven by the demand of consumers. However, if no empirical studies are conducted on the motivations of these dark tourism consumers, the full potential of this industry may not be realized.

The focus of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of tourists who have visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, California. In particular, the motivations of these tourists was examined in order to fill a gap in the literature regarding empirical studies on the lived experiences and perceptions of celebrity grave tourists that inform their desires to visit places that are set apart from others by the events of death and suffering that have occurred there (Isaac & Çakmak, 2013).

Purpose

While scholarly literature on dark tourism has been in existence for several years, there remains a dearth on studies on celebrity grave tourism. In addition, much of the prior scholarly attention on dark tourism centers on the perspectives of the providers of dark tourism and has not
investigated the lived experiences of the consumers. Given that dark tourism involves at least two parties (the provider and the consumer) wielding two distinct pulls (supply and demand), the lack of focus on the phenomenon from the perspective of the consumer would likely lead to an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon and the motivations behind these consumers’ attraction towards dark tourism. Farmaki (2013) noted that dark tourism appears to be supply-driven and attraction-based. Sharpley (2005) supported this view, arguing that it is essential to consider both supply and demand elements in order to be able to construct a framework of this phenomenon.

This qualitative phenomenological study attempted to determine the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding their motivations in visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA. An exploration of these lived experiences and perceptions regarding these tourists’ motivations could help better understand the phenomenon of dark tourism, and provide empirical information concerning the development of other dark tourism sites in the United States.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study in its purpose were as follows:

**RQ1.** What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers that have led them to seek out Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

**RQ2.** What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers that have led them to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?
RQ3. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding their expectations in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

RQ4. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding the benefits they feel that they receive from visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

Nature of the Study

This study was qualitative and phenomenological in nature. These methods were used in order to best understand the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourist consumers at Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA. This qualitative approach and design was chosen because of its appropriateness in trying to reveal underlying attitudes, beliefs, and motives, which are beyond the scope of quantitative deductive methodologies, and allow for an understanding of a phenomenon from a real world perspective (Silverman, 2011). The main strength of the qualitative approach is its ability to study phenomena that are unavailable elsewhere, as it is in this case (Silverman, 2011). Given the relative newness of the phenomenon of dark tourism and the lack of empirical research on the subject, there are no specific theories or hypotheses to be tested, as are needed in quantitative studies (Creswell, Klassen, Clark, Smith, 2011). There are also no definite variables, independent or otherwise, in the phenomenon of dark tourism that could yield numeric data to be analyzed statistically (Creswell, et al., 2011). Moreover, by using a qualitative approach, this study used naturally occurring data to determine the contexts in which the participants’ meanings are employed (Silverman, 2011). In other words, it does not just answer what the phenomenon is--but also how that phenomenon arises.
There are numerous methods of qualitative research, including case study, grounded theory, and phenomenological. A case study most often focuses on a specific case in a context that investigates a phenomenon as it occurs that is, in real time (Yin, 2009). Grounded theory allows researchers to formulate new concepts from the data collected and does not allow the researcher to assume that an existing theory will be able to explain the results of the study (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The phenomenological method permits feelings and experiences to be more fleshed out and helps shed light on the context of a given phenomenon (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008).

This study was a qualitative phenomenological study. This research design was chosen because the purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of death tourism consumers and their motivating factors for visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe. The phenomenological design is most appropriate for this study as there is a lack of literature on the topic, which means that new data must be gathered on the phenomenon, involving detailed examinations of a participant’s life experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2010). As Moustakas (1994) noted, this is done in order to illustrate the essence of a specific phenomenon. In determining the motivating factors of death tourism consumers, the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions must be gathered; this data can often be difficult to measure numerically, and requires a research design that accommodates subjectivity.

A qualitative phenomenological research design sheds light on the phenomenon through the perceptions of the participants, while allowing the research to play an active role (Smith & Osborn, 2010). While the lived experiences of the participants may diverge from one another, the richness of the collected perceptions are able to help provide a clearer understanding of the phenomenon—one perception at a time (Finlay, 2009).
According to Hein and Austin (2001), there are two kinds of phenomenological research: hermeneutic and empirical. Hermeneutic phenomenological research analyzes a phenomenon from texts or other narrative forms as a data source, while empirical methodology analyzes an individual’s experiences regarding a specific phenomenon (Hein & Austin, 2001). An empirical phenomenological method was chosen for this study since it fits more in line with the goal of this study to examine the lived experiences of dark tourism consumers by emphasizing an understanding of the similarities and differences in the individual experiences, by using the participants’ own words and using open coding and content analysis to group them under themes and patterns of observable phenomena of those visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Holton, 2010; Krippendorff & Bock, 2009; Silverman, 2011). It is through this process that the empirical phenomenological method can generate greater understanding of a phenomenon.

By examining the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers who have visited the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA, this study remedies the gap in the literature of death tourism and provides insights to better understand the experiences and perceptions informing the motivations of dark tourism consumers, and may serve useful in future developments or improvements of other dark tourism sites in the country.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant, as it better explains an aspect of dark tourism that has so far been largely overlooked in scholarly literature, namely, the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers that inform their motivations to visit celebrity gravesites, such as Marilyn Monroe’s. By adding to the literature on dark tourism, this study provides a clearer
understanding of dark tourism as a whole, and may provide future direction for additional research on the motivations of dark tourism consumers. This study may also assist dark tourism suppliers by revealing the motivations of their consumers, thus helping them in planning developments and/or improvements of their dark tourism sites in the future. It may also provide consumers of dark tourism with perceived objectives during their visit to such sites.

**Scope and Limitations**

The participants of this study were all self-identified tourists who previously visited the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe. An assumption was made that the information gathered from the participants was honest and accurate to their own lived experiences and perceptions regarding their motivations in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. This assumption is made even more pressing by the fact that the interviews conducted were undertaken through e-mail, which means that no personal observations were made on whether or not a participant was telling the truth. This means that the reliability of the data gathered was wholly dependent on the truthfulness of the participants’ responses. However, collecting data in this way, that is, at a date after the participant’s visit, did offer the advantage of allowing the participants to reflect on their visits.

Additionally, given that this study focused on the death tourism consumers who have visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, the data gathered from the participants may not be generalizable to other death tourism consumers with similar interests, such as those who have visited Elvis Presley’s gravesite: it is possible that the motivating factors of those who have visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite would be different from those who have visited Elvis Presley’s gravesite, for instance. Therefore, studies of different sites might yield different motivations and perceptions.
Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature. It begins with a critical history of dark tourism, and an overview of the literature discussing the phenomenon of visiting celebrity gravesites. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the possible implications the literature has on the field of death tourism along with tentative directions for future research in the area.

Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the research methods and design chosen for this study—which were qualitative and empirically phenomenological. Included in this chapter is a justification of the research design chosen (from both a historical and an applied perspective), an outline of the data collection process and a description of how the data collected is analyzed. Using content analysis, codes and themes that emerge from the e-mail interviews are presented in order to recognize similarities and differences between the responses of study participants.

In Chapters 4 and 5, this study presents the results obtained, then an analysis and discussion concerning what that data means. Finally, the results are discussed regarding implications for business and recommendations for future research along with ultimate conclusions regarding the lived experiences that inform the motivations of death tourism consumers who have visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Stone (2006) has classified celebrity grave tourism be a “lighter” form of dark tourism (p. 172). Raine (2013) agreed with this assessment. Despite the rapid rise of dark tourism as a distinct academic pursuit following the years after 9/11, scholarly literature on dark tourism has focused more on the theoretical underpinnings of the phenomenon and the perspectives of dark tourism suppliers, as opposed to the lived experiences of the dark tourism consumers. As a result, a lack of understanding remains in regards to the motivations of these consumers. This lack of understanding may lead to pejorative suppositions on their morality.

Chapter 2 conducts a review of related literature that explores the historical background, current theories and conceptions, and future directions for research on the phenomenon of dark tourism. Selected peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, manuals, references, books, and periodicals will be reviewed.

Tourism and its Subgroups

Before delving into the history of dark tourism, it is helpful to establish the context in which dark tourism is situated. This provides a better understanding of what makes dark tourism a subgroup of general tourism and how dark tourism differentiates from other subgroups of general tourism.

Firstly, a distinction should be made between the terms tourism, leisure, and recreation. A layperson’s understanding of tourism may hold that the three terms are basically synonymous with each other in the sense that tourism is simply leisure and recreation pursued in places to which the visitor does not originally belong. However, to be precise, while tourism often includes leisure and recreation, and does take place in places outside the tourist’s home area, there exists some kinds of tourism that are not primarily leisure-driven.
Mosonyi, Konyves, Fodor, and Muller (2013) claimed that leisure time activities are inseparable from an individual’s way of life. Leisure time is any time that is beyond the time allocated for what he called material activities, such as economic, social, and physiological constraint-based activities (Leitner & Leitner, 2012). To be able to gain a deeper understanding of leisure time, it can be contrasted to other kinds of personal time such as time that contains obligations or commitments, including work and personal care time, which refers to time required for the maintenance of the basic necessities of life that constitute an individual’s well being (Leitner & Leitner, 2012).

Mosonyi et al. (2013) interpreted the difference between the two definitions to be a matter of emphasis: while the former definition treats leisure time as any time wherein individuals may act based purely on their desires on what to do and where, the latter definition incorporates all the activities that individuals can do in their free time, such as personal recreation and entertainment, maintaining harmonious relationships with others, and personal betterment or learning. Leisure-driven activities, then, include activities as diverse as parasailing, going to museums, and watching television. This means that, even though watching television may be defined as a leisure activity, it cannot be deemed as an instance of leisure tourism, as it does not involve being outside one’s own permanent residence.

Recreation, on the other hand was defined by Bowen and Clarke (2009) as being comprised of any activity that is carried out during leisure time. While this may include activities that fall under the label tourism, such as visiting faraway beaches or monuments, it also includes other, more quotidian activities, such as watching television and eating out in restaurants. Some scholars treat the terms leisure activity and recreation as synonymous (Leitner & Leitner, 2012). Applied to tourism, the term recreation refers not just to tourism activities, but rather, refers to all
activities individuals engage in during their leisure time. As had been previously stated, tourism can include both leisure and recreation, and not all kinds of tourism are driven solely by leisure. Some subgroups of tourism are not motivated primarily by leisure.

Some instances of these subgroups may be found in the succeeding discussion. What follows is a short discussion of various subgroups of tourism, and how dark tourism is situated in that context.

**Educational Tourism**

This subgroup of tourism can be defined as any kind of tourism primarily motivated by reasons that involve learning something new. Educational tourism is comprised of many different sub-sectors of tourism, such as eco-tourism, heritage tourism, rural tourism, and student exchange, according to Gibson (1998). These sub-sectors are attractive to certain tourists as they involve aspects that promote and educate on certain characteristics of a destination (Topp, 2011). Examples of this would be visiting the Amazon forest to learn more about its animals or witnessing how a rural farm functions. Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) noted the recent growth in this subgroup of tourism, especially among those who have retired earlier in life.

**Cultural Tourism**

The term ‘culture’ encompasses everything that an individual learns as part of a society (Topp, 2011). There are two kinds of culture: external and internal. External culture refers to the choices individuals make as part of a particular society; for instance, individuals’ choices about the way that they dress or the food they prefer are largely influenced by the society in which they belong (Topp, 2011). Internal culture refers to the inner life of individuals that are strongly influenced by their society; examples of this would be an individual’s language, beliefs, religious and political views, and social norms (Topp, 2011).
By engaging in cultural tourism, tourists are able to experience cultures different from their own by visiting tourist attractions that hold a particular significance for that place, attending local events or holidays, or by seeking out and enjoying a specific culture’s cuisine. Sigala and Leslie (2005) traced this rise in prominence of cultural tourism to the greater interest towards local, regional, and national history as a way of getting in touch with or expressing one’s own identity. Topp (2011) claimed that the interest towards the arts, history, and culture rose during the 1980s and motivated more cultural tourism, especially among the elderly people who have the money, free time, and sophistication to want to learn more about the world and the various cultures in different parts of the world.

Special Interest Tourism

Special interest tourism is comprised of instances of tourism that is primarily motivated by niche interests, such as adventure tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, ecotourism, culinary tourism, wildlife tourism, heritage tourism, and medical tourism, although some other kinds may still be discovered (Kruja & Gyrezi, 2011). In basic terms, this kind of tourism is one wherein the motivating factor is a personal interest that may be limited to certain kinds of people. The kinds of tourisms included in this subgroup may be found in other kinds as well; some kinds of tourism can be classified as special interest tourism in general, and another subgroup in specific.

For instance, while most tourists must consume their visited place’s native food at some point, some tourists go to a place specifically to eat that food. Traveling to eat the specific food is, then, the primary motivating factor for their decision to visit that place. This can either be the locus of the trip or simply be part of a trip. Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) mentioned visiting battlefields and other places of significant military history as examples of this kind of tourism, in
that the particular reason for engaging in this kind of tourism may not be held by all tourists.
There may also be more than one reason for this kind of tourism, which may be seen in the various ways one kind of tourism is grouped. For instance, visiting battlefields may be seen as special interest tourism, heritage tourism, or educational tourism, depending on visitor motivations. Some tourists may find a personal meaning in battlefields, while some simply want to know more about history.

**Heritage Tourism**

A heritage is defined as something that we inherit from the past. It is self-evident that individuals inherit different things from different pasts, both literally and figuratively. Since each individual’s past is different, the meanings and motivations they may have regarding that past are often different as well. Therefore, heritage tourism can be defined as the kind of tourism where the meaning of their tourism is best defined through the perceptions or motivations of the tourists themselves, rather than the intrinsic attributes of a tourist site. In other words, the tourists bring the meaning to the site, rather than the site having meaning in itself. Nostalgia has been found to be a very strong factor in influencing heritage tourism. Poria, Reichel, and Biran (2006) stated that heritage tourism occurs whenever a tourist visits spaces or locations that have been classified as heritage sites and views historical artifacts that link that tourist to the heritage being exhibited. This linking of that artifact and the history in which it is perceived in relation to the tourist’s own background is, therefore, important. Given this, the experiences, of heritage tourists may vary from individual to individual, depending on what they deem to be significant to themselves and their own heritage. This is distinct from educational tourism as it often involves emotional experiences that allow tourists to feel a linkage or kinship to their ancestors (Poria, et al., 2006). The value of heritage can therefore be deemed subjective in that it varies from individual to
individual and is not tied down to a particular historical occurrence in a particular place. In other words, heritage tourism relies on the psychological resonance of a place as filtered through an individual (Davison, 2000).

**History of Dark Tourism**

The term ‘dark tourism’ was first used by Foley and Lennon (1996), although the phenomenon the term describes has existed for hundreds of years. Foley and Lennon (1996) used the term “dark tourism” to describe the kind of tourism that involves visiting sites of death, suffering, and tragedy, for the purposes of remembrance, education, and entertainment. Stone (2013) has maintained that, despite the newness of the term “dark tourism”, visiting places associated with death has occurred as long as people have been able to travel. What is now called dark tourism can easily be traced from tourism that involved visiting sites of war. In fact, Smith (1998) claimed that visitor sites associated with war were likely to be the most numerous in the categories of tourist attractions in the world.

Seaton (2010) argued that dark tourism is simply traditional travel that evolved through the passage of time. As history evolves, it is made in more places. This creation of more places that hold some kind of historical significance has been identified as one motivator for dark tourism consumers by Isaac and Çakmak (2014). Specifically, in cases of visits to places of war, dark tourism consumers have been seen as making a secular pilgrimage, akin to the early Christians with their own holy places (Hyde & Harman, 2011). Battlefield tours have also been found by Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011) to offer tourists the chance for pilgrimage, collective and personal remembrance, and event validation, especially for participants who have had battlefield tour experience. This phenomenon can be seen in Seaton (1996), who described tourists in the Middle Ages making long pilgrimages to sites they considered holy, as they were
linked to the death of Christ and other prophets. Additionally, dark tourism as a phenomenon can be seen in the popularity of public executions in the 18th century, and in Madame Tussaud’s wax recreations of death scenes in the 19th century (Seaton, 1996). What is notable here is that these examples show that what may be perceived as squeamishness in the general public regarding dark tourism is simply a product of changes in society’s attitudes towards death, as opposed to changing tastes on the part of the tourists (Seaton, 1996).

Through Seaton’s historical exposition, it is possible to establish that dark tourism has existed long before the term itself grew in popularity. Simply put, death has always been something that people have found interesting. One possible reason why dark tourism as a phenomenon has grown into a profitable industry in recent times is the absence of death in discourse that is not filtered through contexts that make it difficult to confront our own mortality honestly. An example of this would be violent movies where thousands of violent deaths can be seen without the audience thinking even once about the victim’s pain or the grief of their remaining families.

Minić (2012) analyzed the concept of dark tourism as a type of special interest tourism, which tends be context-specific and popular among the younger population and middle-aged individuals who have knowledge, awareness, and interest about history and culture. Minić (2012) contended that dark tourism offers different experiences in different countries. For instance, dark tourism attractions in Serbia such as the Memorial Park Sumarice are not very popular among tourists. This was attributed to the lack of coverage of the media about the different dark tourism sites in Serbia. Conversely, the Dracula Park in Romania, Amsterdam, and London and the World Trade Center site in New York City are oversaturated with tourists. The promotion that these dark tourism sites receive from the media can explain why these sites
have become popular to tourists. Minić (2012) concluded that “the development of dark tourism and some of the countries at the national level is positioned as a destination which are distinguished by this kind of tourism” (p. 81).

Stone and Sharpley (2008) claimed that the reason for the increased popularity of dark tourism in modern society is because of a natural human emphasis on the possession of ontological security (i.e. a stable mental state derived from continuity of life) in which the threats to our existence as individuals are often hidden away by society to maintain a sense of order and safety in our lives. However, this state of mind tends to be undermined by experiences of angst borne from disorder or chaos (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Thus, despite every individual knowing that death is unavoidable it is very rare for someone to think about their own death, leaving them uncertain and more fearful once death actually becomes possible in their own minds (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). The absence of death from honest discourse and its omnipresence in actual life may lead some individuals to desire more information about death, and through dark tourism, Stone and Sharpley (2008) argued that dark tourism consumers are bringing death back into their consciousness and readying themselves for their own mortality.

Past studies suggest that expectations of people who consume dark tourism may range from educational to satiating curiosity, and from the anticipation of experiencing deeper connections to simply fascination (Deuchar, 1996; Foley & Lennon, 1996; Levitt, 2010). The expectations of people who consume dark tourism do not necessarily coincide with their actual experiences of a dark tourism site such as cemeteries and gravesites (Levitt, 2012). The expectations of people who consume dark tourism are diverse and may depend on personal factors (Minić, 2012). Citing the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles as an example, Levitt (2012) contended that the cemetery combines both the reflections of death and the
celebratory remembrance of famous people. Some people visit the cemetery for a more celebratory purpose, whereas others visit primarily to pay respect to the dead. The cemetery has become a popular tourist attraction, which was encouraged by the transformation of the space into a social place for festivals, film screenings, and other social events. However, some people have objected to this practice because they perceived that these activities disrespect the dead. These varying opinions of people regarding Hollywood Forever Cemetery underscore that different people attribute different meanings and purpose to dark tourism attractions (Levitt, 2012).

In a case study that examines the sinking of the Titanic and its relation to dark tourism, Deuchar (1996) noted the success of an exhibition of Titanic artifacts at a museum in Greenwich, England. The tension between what some may consider bad taste in relation to a major tragedy being treated as a commodity and the good commercial sense of continuing with a successful exhibit was on clear display. The tension may be stronger in this case than in others, given that museums are committed to educating the public, and yet are beholden to commercial matters in order for them to continue operating. Deuchar (1996) pointed to a long history of media attention on the Titanic—from the initial news coverage, to the famous novel and film created in the 1950s—that stoked the public’s attention for any information they could find regarding the tragedy, including an eagerness to view artifacts that, though macabre, compelled fascination. The Deuchar (1996) study showed that demand for dark tourism experiences are high and that questions of good taste may be ignored or set aside by certain suppliers if demands are significant enough.

Another example that could be cited for the historical occurrence of dark tourism previous to the formulation of its name would be the continued fascination on the sites associated
with John F. Kennedy, namely the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Massachusetts, the 6th floor book depository in Dallas, Texas, and the eternal flame in Washington, D.C. Foley and Lennon (1996) found that, while numerous people were interested in death of JFK and the circumstances surrounding it, the media also played a role in turning these sites into places of historical significance. As more and more people were made aware, and were supplied the means to satiate their desires to make their secular pilgrimages to sites associated with JFK, more people were then enticed to do the same thing. As shown in Whyte (1980), people attract more people.

Foley and Lennon (1996) showed how the commoditization of JFK’s death was accomplished through dark tourism suppliers. In contrast to the educational aims they put forth as their primary goal, they found out that the educational component of the dark tourism packages were secondary to the generation of ticket sales (Lennon & Foley, 2006). They noticed that while dark tourism consumers behaved respectfully during their tours, dark tourism suppliers packaged their tours to coincide with the seamier, more macabre aspects of JFK’s death. The assumption here on the part of the suppliers would seem to be that, despite all outward signs of reverence or solely educational motivations on the part of tourists, which may lead them to hesitate in pushing to view objects present during JFK’s assassination, they would be most likely drawn to exhibits such as Jackie Onassis’ bloodied jacket. This may be seen as an extension of Sherman’s (2007) analysis on how, in certain hospitality fields, suppliers feel the need to preempt the desires of their clients, determining that (a) the clients want a specific thing, and (b) it would be unlikely for them to ask for that thing explicitly, due to feelings, perhaps, of shame.
While illuminating, these studies all concentrated more on the supplier of dark tourism, rather on the tourists. As a result, although scholars have established that dark tourism consumers have shown their desires to experience dark tourism, the motivations that compel them to do so have been ignored. What they have borne, however, is an increased amount of scholarly research on the topic of dark tourism, specifically places wherein some of the darkest incidents of humanity have occurred. However very little is known about both the dark tourism consumers who favor the lighter shades of dark tourism and the motivations those consumers have for visiting them. This has led to a lot of discussion on the commercialized dark tourism sites and the perceptions of those that manage these sites, but has neglected a thorough conception of the factors that influence dark tourism consumers to engage in such tours, especially tourists who engage in lighter shades of dark tourism, such as visiting celebrity gravesites.

The gravesite of famous celebrities can be a place that fans can use as a venue to engage with other fans and engage with the celebrity that they idolized or admired (Huggins, 2012). According to Huggins (2012), the gravesites of deceased sports celebrities can be a venue that can engage fans. Visiting the tombstones of deceased sport celebrities provide an opportunity for reflective activities beyond the person. For instance, fans who visit the tombstone of a sports personality are able to commemorate the culture and history of sports, which can lead to a greater appreciation of sports.

This sentiment was also indicated in the study by Alderman (2002), where he examined the visitors of Graceland, in Memphis, Tennessee, the mansion of Elvis Presley that contains his gravesite and now serves as a popular tourist attraction, decades after his death. More specifically, he investigated the visitors’ practice of leaving messages on the fieldstone wall outside the Graceland mansion. Alderman (2002) found that the messages left by these visitors
differed considerably; there were several discourses co-existing with each other in the visitors’ respective conceptions of Elvis Presley. Despite the visitors sharing the experience of wanting to visit Graceland, the reasons they may have for wanting to do so may differ, given that the meaning of Elvis was seen to be not fixed, but in a constant state of redefinition (Alderman, 2002).

While Alderman (2002) examined the messages left by the visitors, he did not interview any of the tourists, and the data he collected may be influenced by the context where they were made. For instance, given that the messages were public, visitors may have more of a motivation to leave poetic messages that might be more indicative of their desire for posterity or for their words to be remembered by their fellow visitors, as opposed to an accurate depiction of their feelings. An implication of the findings of Alderman (2002) for dark tourism research is that dark tourism motivations may differ, not just from person to person, but also from time to time.

Blom (2000) studied tourist attractions that have been chiefly associated with accidents and sudden violent death, and paid particular attention to Princess Diana’s gravesite at Althorp in England. The study focused more on the theoretical meanings behind the appeal of these tourist sites, and did not undertake an in-depth examination of the tourists’ motivations.

A study by Levitt (2010) examined stardom using the lens of dark tourism sites associated with Hollywood stars. She stated that Hollywood’s dark tourism depended on a traditional view of stardom that no longer exists today, which has altered the way our culture produces celebrities. In previous times, Hollywood stars were secluded from the public view by their studios, which intensified public fascination. This is in contrast to today’s celebrities, most of whom can be seen in tabloid journalism—in print, on television, or online—engaging in everyday activities, such as walking their dogs, drinking coffee, and watching their children play.
(Levitt, 2010). This study provided insight on the factors that have influenced the continued public fascination with stars from previous eras, but does not empirically investigate the motivations for dark tourism consumers.

This limitation can also be found in the study of Jim Morrison’s gravesite in Paris by Margry (2008). Margry (2008) stated that Morrison’s gravesite at the Parisian cemetery Pere Lachaise has been transformed into a place where his fans—old and new—could figuratively bring him back to life, and where his legacy can be propagated. While the study sheds light on possible motivations and the theoretical concepts behind such pilgrimages, Margry (2008) did not conduct an empirical examination of the motivations of these tourists. As such, the conclusion made regarding the social construction behind the sacred stature of Morrison’s grave can only be seen as a possible motivation for dark tourism consumers. Research still needs to be done that examines the perceptions of the tourists themselves, using their own words.

The call to examine the lived experiences of dark tourism consumers was taken up by a study by Cheal and Griffin (2013) on the experiences of Australian tourists at Gallipoli, a battlefield site. They paid specific attention to the role that interpretation played in the shaping of the tourists’ experiences, and emphasized that, given the variety of circumstances and ways of engaging with the tourist experience in Gallipoli, it would be prudent to use an empirical design that would best capture the different perceptions of these tourists (Cheal & Griffin, 2013). The authors found that Australians visited Gallipoli for a number of different reasons, including national sentiment and personal connections, both of which are highly personal and vary from individual to individual (Cheal & Griffin, 2013). The findings of their study cannot be generalized, given their contention that potential reasons for dark tourism vary from individual to individual. Additionally, the participants—all Australian—may have influenced their findings.
Nonetheless, the study by Cheal and Griffin (2013) has provided empirical evidence on how tourists engage with battlefield tourism sites, and lends credence to the large role that interpretation plays in shaping the overall experience. An implication of this would be that more research is needed on other groups, in order to better understand the dark tourism experience on their end.

**Gap in the History of Dark Tourism Literature**

Despite the expansion of understanding with regards to the tourist experiences of dark tourism, there remains a lack of insight regarding the feelings, desires, and motivations that surround the dark tourism experience from the perspective of consumers. As Biran (2011) noted, the current literature on dark tourism rarely strays from a supply perspective, and has so far failed to give a comprehensive account of the tourist experience. The subsequent section will therefore discuss the literature on the possible motivations for dark tourism.

**Possible Motivations for Dark Tourism**

In a field as diverse as dark tourism, it would not be unreasonable to assume there are several possible motivations that could influence dark tourism consumers. Scholars in the field have speculated on possible motivations as far back as 1998, oftentimes drawing upon literature and theoretical perspectives found in other disciplines to understand a phenomenon that would, at first glance, seem to be too morbid for most people to enjoy.

One of the earliest forays into establishing an understanding of dark tourism consumers came from Dann (1998), who enumerated five main motivations for these people: 1) a desire to interact with ghosts, 2) a desire for novelty not found in mainstream tourism, 3) a desire for nostalgia, 4) a desire to celebrate crime and deviance that would not be well-received in their everyday lives, and 5) a desire to experience an awareness of death and how that relates to their
status as a tourist. Furthermore, he insisted that it would be meaningless to research tourism if the motivations of the tourists are not considered (Dann, 1998).

The first possible motivation for dark tourism consumers is a desire for phantoms. This can be understood as confronting and potentially overcoming fears from their childhood. By visiting dark tourism sites, consumers are able to face their fears from previous years from a safer vantage point and thus could overcome their fears and make them feel exhilarated. As noted by Sandseter and Kennair (2011), the coping skills of a person determine whether certain situations or stimuli can be mastered and no longer feared. It is in this understanding of coping skills that we may understand the drive for dark tourism consumers to engage in tourism, according to Dann (1998). Dann (1998) posited that these consumers may have certain fears regarding death or morbidity that they hope to overcome—whether consciously or unconsciously—by visiting dark tourism sites. Through these thrilling experiences, dark tourism consumers may find themselves able to break free from previous fear and feel better for it, which could likely cause them to repeat their dark tourism consumer patterns.

The second possible motivation, novelty, can be explained by the desire to seek something new, something out of the ordinary. As has been noted by numerous scholars, the effects of the advent of social networking websites have had a tremendous effect on tourism. According to Russell (2010), consumers today are spending more of their time on social media sites, where their experiences and opinions can be broadcast immediately and potentially reach thousands of other consumers. Given this, more tourism options may be seen as plausible for tourists, options they may not have known of before.

Novelty has often been defined as the contrast between a present situation and a past situation (Pearson, 1970). Applied to tourism, Faison (1977) defined novel tourism as the kind of
tourism where experiences and activities can be had that are perceived as markedly different from the everyday lives of the tourists; this seeking for novelty is often assumed to be inherent in all tourism, and plays an essential role in the decision-making process of all kinds of tourists (Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011; Cohen, 1979; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Petrick, 2002).

Since the drive for novelty and the new and unexpected experiences is inherent in tourism, the arrival of new social media technologies that are able to broadcast tourism sites that have previously been neglected in traditional tourism and media can be seen as a factor in the burgeoning phenomenon of dark tourism. Miguens, Baggio, and Costa (2008) noted that tourism has a very close relationship with any new developments in information and communication technology, since, the sharing of information about tourism sites have been seen to influence the number of tourists in a particular site. In the case of dark tourist sites, they have traditionally been excluded from mainstream tourism, which makes them novel. Given its novelty, and the fact that novelty is often treated as inherent in tourist motivations, social networking sites that spread the word about dark tourism sites broadcast that novelty to potential tourists, some of whom then become dark tourism consumers.

The third possible motivation, nostalgia, is informed not just by a longing for a certain place, but rather a desire to return back to a different time, often the time of our childhood (Boym, 2001). Nostalgia was defined by Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, and Routledge (2008) as a self-relevant emotion colored with positive affective qualities, with the potential to benefit to the holder of the emotion. Nostalgia is experienced by nearly everyone at a frequent rate of one to three times a week (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, and Routledge, 2006). This feeling of nostalgia is often marked by a sense of sentimentality and loss and the past is viewed through a more flattering light, its imperfections and inconveniences sanded-off mentally in sharp contrast to the
brute realities of the present (Zhou, Wildschut, Sedikides, Chen, & Vingerhoets, 2012). Zauberma

n, Ratner, and Kim (2009) noted that this can be seen in the ways that individuals attempt to protect special memories from being forgotten. This can indicate that self-enhancing benefits are present during instances of nostalgia, where not only is the individual’s self-esteem raised, but also that nostalgia can help structure the content and priority of the events the individuals utilize during their nostalgia. Vess, Arndt, Routledge, Sedikides, and Wildschut (2012) gave an instance of this wherein individuals who derive their self-worth from relationships—as opposed to other things (such as personal achievements) may likely make them more nostalgic about events that can contribute to their conception of self-worth, such as previous relationships.

In relation to dark tourism, nostalgia can be seen as a motivating factor for tourists to visit places that have significant meaning for them personally, and as a way of engaging in what Tarlow (2005, p. 52) called “tourism nostalgia”, where the “traveler seeks to heal from past hurts by traveling back in time.” In dark tourism, Tarlow (2005, p. 52) noted that dark tourism consumers engage in such behaviors as a way to “de-differentiate the past from the present, to find danger in the safe”. What this implies is that if nostalgia were indeed a motivation for dark tourism consumers, it would be in line with the subjective experiences of the tourists themselves and what they wish to overcome. For instance, a person may wish to visit Holocaust museums as a way to feel better at the racial progress the world has achieved from that time, which may help them be more comfortable in their place of residence. The more than 100 Holocaust centers in the world have been dedicated to never let us forget the grave injustice that was committed to the Jews by Nazis, and has been claimed to allow people to mourn and be aware of the human capacity for evil and intolerance (Braithwaite & Lee, 2006).
The fourth motivation, a desire to celebrate crime and deviance that may not be accepted in the tourists’ everyday lives, may be best understood in the continued fascination societies have with outlaws that can be seen in the proliferation of movies and other media that have anti-heroes as their protagonists. While openly cheering for anti-heroes in real life may be uncomfortable for a lot of individuals due to societal pressures, this constraint can be removed through the process of depersonalization offered by movies and, in this case, dark tourism attractions. The fascination that some individuals may feel towards criminals can be filtered through a lens of historical significance and thus de-fang a lot of what may be deemed socially unacceptable in these individuals’ interests. For instance, Stone (2006) mentioned the existence of Jack the Ripper walks in London. If one were to proclaim themselves as particularly interested in someone who is currently doing what Jack the Ripper has done—namely, dismember and, in some cases, cannibalize on women—that individual may be ostracized socially. However, if that individual were to claim an interest in Jack the Ripper, that person may be deemed merely as a “history buff”. Therefore, engaging in dark tourism may be an outlet for certain individuals to express their desires to celebrate crime and deviance in a manner that is socially acceptable.

The last possible motivation offered, which is to experience an awareness of death, can be understood indifferent ways. The first is in terms of the inherently human need to contemplate death. This framework was also utilized by Stone and Sharpley (2008) when they mentioned that the current popularity of dark tourism may be due to the fact that death is no longer as “present” in our day-to-day lives as it was in the past. For instance, the medical and technological advancements in recent times have extended the human lifespan and made it possible for people to live to an old age with a minimum amount of pain, as compared to previous times. Additionally, a lot of fatal diseases are now curable. These factors have contributed to the
modern person’s psychological distance from death, as compared to the past, where death could come at the slightest notice (Stone, 2012a).

Stone and Sharpley (2008) argued that this distance leads to a lack of awareness or preparations regarding our inevitable deaths, which have made some individuals feel uncertain or fearful about their own death. Through dark tourism, therefore, these individuals may be able to face their fears and bring death back into the fore of their consciousness, allowing them to learn more about death in order to ready themselves eventually for their own death by avoiding the terror and dread that often comes with contemplating it (Stone & Sharpely, 2008).

Another way to understand Dann’s (1998) fifth argument that dark tourism is motivated by the desire to experience an awareness of death is to look at the underlying scholarship of tourism research notable Dean MacCannell.

**Modern and Postmodern Tourism**

MacCannell’s (1976) arguments attempted to establish that modern tourism is motivated primarily by a desire of participants to engage in modernity and to see what is unseen is of particular interest. For MacCannell (1976), this means that through tourism, individuals are able to see how their lives differ from the individuals who reside in the places they visit, and also to test whether their experiences in those places are similar to what he have encountered through books or television. However, this view of tourism as a pursuit of a “reality” hidden by our modern culture to which individuals may compare their cultures, life experiences, or learning, is paradoxically undermined by the activity of tourism (MacCannell, 1976). According to him, tourism polishes away the difference that tourists seek to experience by those tourists’ expectations that carry over from their own culture.
For instance, visiting a different country to supposedly experience a vibrant culture different from our own can be undermined by the accommodations that managers of tourist attractions have to make in order to help tourists be more comfortable, such as making hamburgers, fries, and other quintessentially American food available for them. The point that MacCannell (1976) made can be understood to mean that despite some Americans wanting to experience the “real” place, they would be unable to do so, given the commercial viability of reworking reality to fit into certain constraints that tourists are willing to believe.

In a third-world country where everyone is “nice” to tourists, for instance, it would not be difficult to believe that such people are just from another culture that values niceness or that they simply love Americans. However, what MacCannell (1976) pointed out was that it would be very difficult at the place and moment where tourism exists to determine an answer based on reality, as reality has already been distorted and repackaged to fit the commercial interests of tourism suppliers to provide not just an “authentic” experience, but a “pleasurable” one as well. This of course can sometimes be contradictory, given the difference in standards of pleasure among cultures. Urry (1995, p. 140) deemed this state as “staged authenticity”, following MacCannell (1973). It is through maneuvering through the places with an obvious “staged authenticity” that one can become the best kind of tourist, in MacCannell’s framework (Schudson, 1979).

As MacCannell states, touristic shame

…is not based on being a tourist but on not being tourist enough, on a failure to see everything the way it 'ought' to be seen. The touristic critique of tourism is based on a desire to go beyond the other 'mere' tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture, and it is by no means limited to intellectual statements. All tourists desire
this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel (1976, p. 10).

What can be seen here is the emphasis on the “authentic” as a primary motivator for tourists, despite the issue of “staged authenticity” that is purportedly inherent in activities that commercially reward the paradoxical combination of a perception of authenticity with the comforts of home (MacCannell, 1973).

MacCannell (1976) examined globalization and the shifting focus of our society on leisure rather than work, as it was during previous times, most notably during the Industrial Revolution. Postmodernism is a perspective that holds life in today's world is mostly a reaction to dealing with the by-products of industrialization. The effects of industrialization has made some countries wealthier than others, and due to certain global developments, the colonialism and domination rampant during that time are no longer allowed.

However, the effects of this can still be seen in how poorer countries still remain without access to wealth distribution and poverty relief; instead, they continue the pattern of domination in a subtler form, as can be seen in developing countries that embrace tourism as a first economical option (Korstanje, 2013). Tourism, therefore, not only “sublimates human deprivations” but also works as an “ideological mechanism” in order for the status quo not to lose its “legitimacy” (Korstanje, 2013, p. 104). Human poverty and suffering can be thus treated as commodities, as moments of authenticity specially packaged for tourists (MacCannell, 1976).

As MacCannell states:

The concern of moderns for “naturalness,” their nostalgia and their search for authenticity are not merely casual and somewhat decadent, though harmless, attachments to the
souvenirs of destroyed cultures and dead epochs. They are components of the conquering spirit of modernity—the grounds for its unifying consciousness. (1976, p.3)

In the context of tourism, this means that modern tourism is an activity wherein participants are either trying to escape the pressures that the modern world creates or are trying to engage the marvels and horrors that the modern world produces. Given the somewhat macabre nature of dark tourism, it is easy to see how this potential motivation originally articulated by MacCannell was so persuasive to early dark tourism researchers.

This point of view first articulated by MacCannell (1976) was influenced by a larger interdisciplinary school of thought known as postmodernism, especially in its emphasis on the desire by people for authenticity and the paradoxical negation of what they seek through their process of seeking. MacCannell was influenced by the theory of Saussure that claimed that language is a process of adaptation suited for a specific context, in that certain words in a particular language can refer to things that are not referred to in other languages, as they are not part of that culture’s normal range of experiences. MacCannell claimed to discover that tourism can be interpreted in the same way, in that it is a ritual performed to overcome “the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragment into unified experience” (1976, p. 13).

In this postmodern framework, MacCannell (1976) treated tourist attractions as signs and thus the study of signs (semiotics) is necessary to understand tourism. Signs are not things in themselves and therefore have no meaning taken individually; rather, signs simply indicate or point at meanings (MacCannell, 1976). He uses the term “markers” to refer to the first point of contact between a tourist attraction and the tourist, who then combines these discrete experiences to form an idea of the place as a whole. MacCannell (1976) was also influenced by Goffman’s
(1959) ideas on frontstage and backstage. There are six regions that MacCannell states are theoretically discernible, according to Pearce and Moscardo (1986):

Stage one, frontstage, the obvious tourist attractions that more socially constructed tourists seek to conquer or avoid; stage two, frontstage, but has been set up to seem, in certain respects, as if it were backstage; stage three, frontstage, but has been fully set up to appear as backstage; stage four, backstage that is not inaccessible to tourists; and stage five, backstage, but has been modified as to prevent tourists from easy access. MacCannell claimed that only awareness is gained from perceiving backstage areas that there is a lack in their current tourist activities and could therefore spur a desire to pursue the authentic, but MacCannell stated that what tourists see in the backstage can only be “another show” (1976, p. 102). In a more recent reformulation of his thought, MacCannell (2001) described tourists’ motivation as originating from a gaze that understands, consciously or not, that visibility presupposes invisibility; in other words, in their acts of tourism, tourists are able to be aware of suggestions of absences in what they see.

In the previous example, if a tourist were unaware that the place that they are in is simply a frontstage made to appear as a backstage, then that tourist can be understood as having failed to read the signs well. This can lead to incomplete ideas that appear to be whole ideas, as for example, in the case where a tourist’s idea of New York City may only be images of the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, and Katz’s Delicatessen, mediated by blurs of experience. These sites, however, do not encompass all of what New York City has to offer, but in a postmodern viewpoint, these signs, filtered through their own subjective experiences, are what constitute a tourist’s idea of New York City, in this particular case.
This awareness of the fluid way in which tourists are able to experience a place based on their own subjective experiences that MacCannell espoused may be traced back to Lyotard’s (1984) original notion of postmodern, which is simply an “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p. xxiv), which means that overarching narratives that claim objective authority over all other narratives are no longer taken at face value. The modern idea, for instance, that authenticity, naturalness, and an objective reality existed was replaced by an incredulity towards those metanarratives, characterized by an emphasis on amusement as motivation, the recognition that the artificiality of the tourist experience was inherent in tourism, and that there is more than one reality. However, MacCannell did not include the claim that an objective concept of authenticity is no longer needed to understand tourism, as seemingly asserted by Wang (1999).

Wang (1999) argued that contemporary tourists may no longer be concerned with the issues that MacCannell (1976) has raised, and that his notion of objective authenticity may no longer be needed. Cohen (1995) stated that, as opposed to MacCannell’s idea of the modern tourist as someone who seeks authenticity, the postmodern tourist accepts that an aesthetic enjoyment of what is clearly inauthentic is still possible, and is more reflexive on the impact tourism may have on a fragile host community (Wang, 1999). The “staged authenticity” that may have troubled the modern tourist can now be seen by postmodern tourists are more culturally and socially responsible, in that they are able to experience the closest approximation of a specific culture without impeding their progress or their way of life (Cohen, 1995).

**Criticisms of Dann’s Five Possible Motivations for Dark Tourism**

Despite being one of the earliest researchers to address motivations behind dark tourism, many criticisms of Dann (1998) have been made. One major criticism was that Dann’s five factors are not adequately explained, relying more on theoretical notions from fields such as
psychology and sociology, rather than deriving from actual empirical evidence (Seaton & Lennon, 2004). This can imply that despite the explanatory strength of the motivations he offered for dark tourism consumers, it is possible that they may not explain the actual motivations current consumers have for engaging in what is now called dark tourism. In other words, the motivations given by Dann (1998) only indicate at the actual motivations of dark tourism consumers and, as can be seen from the criticism levied at him, can be rejected if one were to reject the sociological or psychological underpinnings that inform his contention.

Another criticism made was in a study by Biran (2011), which found out that dark tourism experiences may be understood as a kind of heritage experience, rather than as a purely dark tourism experience. What this means is that dark tourism may not be distinct from heritage tourism, in that what motivates these tourists is not a sense of the macabre, but rather, a means of remembering or honoring the past (Biran, 2011). Dark tourism as a label for a specific kind of tourism may then appear to be unnecessary, given that the supposed key differentiator of dark tourism from other kinds—namely, its darkness—may not actually be true. If remembrance or pilgrimage to a certain kind of heritage is seen to be the key factor in dark tourism experiences, then it would seem to be the case that the term dark tourism may no longer be needed. The motivations outlined by Dann (1998), therefore, may not completely characterize the motivations of dark tourism consumers; at the very least, it indicates the need for studies on the motivations of dark tourism consumers based on empirical evidence, as the motivations enumerated by Dann (1998) may fall under the general rubric of heritage tourism.

Podoshen (2013) may be seen to agree with what Dann first set out to claim, as he stated that dark tourism can be motivated by processes that relate to simulation and emotional contagion. What this means is that certain tourists may seek out dark tourism suppliers in order
to simulate a certain desires in them—in this case, dark and heavy feelings associated with
death—and through processes of emotional contagion, where the emotional states of at least two
people converge (Podoshen, 2013). Such dark tourism consumers can therefore be understood as
having a desire for certain things that they feel dark tourism offers or they may be influenced by
other people who have such desires. Additionally, Podoshen (2013) claimed that a desire to make
comparisons between real and imagined landscapes can be treated as a possible motivation as
well, which could support MacCannell’s assertion that modern tourism engages primarily with
modernity. By comparing or contrasting dark tourism sites with their own realities, these tourists
may therefore feel that they are more involved in their understanding of the world.

It is important to note that Dann first made this argument in 1998 when the field of dark
tourism was still very young. At that time, most of the scholars in the field were influenced by a
20th century European perspective that dark tourism was mostly about exploring events that
were very violent, tragic, and historically significant. Judging by the history of industrialized
Europe in the 20th century, which saw two World Wars and the Holocaust, it is not surprising
that a postmodernist perspective like the one argued for by MacCannell would be particularly
appealing to early dark tourism scholars.

In the years that have followed Dann’s study, the field of dark tourism has broadened
significantly to include many various shades of dark tourism, not just those related to extreme
violence and tragedy, and from which their historical significance is derived. As a reflection of
this, several scholars have emphasized that there are many different motivations for dark tourism
and that these motivations likely vary both between and within its various types (Seaton &
Lennon, 2004).
In terms of the larger literature in sociology, there certainly is support for this perspective, especially with the advancement of phenomenology as a method to explain the plurality of ways in which tourists may experience tourist motivations.

**Phenomenology and Dark Tourism**

Phenomenology as a philosophical viewpoint understands that any inquiry into the social world will be fundamentally different from inquiries directed towards the natural world (Moustakas, 1994). The objective ontological status of an existing thing must be filtered through the subjective human consciousness to be understood fully and, as such, can be interpreted variously depending on one’s own subjective understanding (Duranti, 2010). For instance, a rock may be a simple rock to someone, but can be an object of great significance to someone who collects rocks, or it could have special meaning because it was, for instance, a rock given to them by a dying grandmother. This plurality in terms of the subjective experiencing of an objective fact—such as a rock—is the main reason why phenomenology focuses on how we give meaning to the social world, as opposed to discovering strict social laws that explain and govern it (Salmon, 2012).

Using a phenomenological lens to place the emphasis squarely on the individual, the idea is that the definition, meaning, and motivation for tourism are all defined by individuals rather than absolute laws. Each experience would then mean something different to each tourist. Accordingly, the reasons behind and meaning of the dark tourist experience is wholly subjective and will vary widely both between and within dark tourism groups. This sociological perspective seems to echo what so many dark tourist articles suggest: that the motivations for dark tourism seem to be just as numbered as the many different forms of dark tourism (Seaton & Lennon,
Taking this perspective into account, one would expect to find the same level of diversity found in the literature on why people pursue dark tourism.

The discipline of psychology also offers a similar account for dark tourists’ motivations, and has attempted to explain the plurality of motivations behind dark tourism. This is seen especially through the concept of a "travel career" as first introduced by Pearce in 1988, and refined in 1991.

Studying amusement park patrons in Australia, Pearce found that the level of importance attached to different categories of needs varied according to different categories of people. For example, young teens were much more concerned with thrills than was seen in comparison to family groups. Pearce (1988) found that his results can be used to construct a five category scale of needs he calls "the leisure ladder". This leisure ladder is based on and follows a similar hierarchical progression as Maslow's (1943, 1954) renowned hierarchy of needs psychological model.

Maslow’s (1943, 1954) ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ are composed of five levels that are organized linearly in the order of completion; as each need is met, the individual then moves up to the next level and seeks to accomplish that goal, until the ultimate goal is achieved. These needs are, starting from the lowest, to the highest: physiological needs, safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954). The first two needs (physiological and safety needs) are called lower order needs, since they have to be satisfied first in order for individuals to attain the three higher order needs. Physiological needs are basic necessities to life, such as breathing, food, and water; safety needs are needs concerned with the maintenance of one’s body, resources, and shelter; belonging needs are where interpersonal relationships may be found, in the need of people to have friends, families, and romantic
partners; esteem involves a healthy self-esteem and confidence and a respect of and by others; and lastly, self-actualization needs where morality, creativity, and spontaneity, among others, are achieved (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

In Pearce’s (1988, 1991) leisure ladder model, he claimed that tourism can help fulfill the needs of people outside of basic physiological needs. It was modeled on Maslow’s (1943, 1954) Hierarchy of Needs but also attempted to explain individual behaviors (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2002). In the same linear order, Pearce’s (1988, 1991) leisure ladder model is as follows: relaxation and bodily needs, stimulation, relationship, self-esteem and development, and fulfillment (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, p. 38).

In this model, Pearce (1988, 1991) claimed that tourists must first address the lower needs before being able to address the higher needs they desired. In 1992, Pearce expanded on this model by conceptualizing the travel-needs model, where he held that tourists have a career in their travel behavior that reflects a hierarchy to their motives for tourism. This is subjective in that the hierarchy is not static or absolute but is relative to each individual tourist and may change over time. A key insight to be gleaned from this model is its emphasis on the possibility that multiple motivations may have various effects on different people, and that a clear-cut hierarchy may not be feasible in assessing the motivations and needs of tourists; in this sense, the categories or needs presented in the leisure ladder model may be reorganized depending on the individual tourist’s own subjective needs (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006).

While Pearce’s (1988, 1991) initial conception of the leisure ladder model was judged as too simplistic and unable to explain all the kinds of tourist motivations and behaviors, his travel-needs model, developed in 1992, may be stronger in its claim that the motivations for tourism are multivariate and subject to change as a person progresses through their lifecycle. While a
hierarchy of tourist needs may exist, an absolute hierarchy was rejected by Pearce (1992), as this does not include the concept of a travel career that informs the individual travel motives of tourists.

Summary

By looking at the larger literature in tourism as well as the literature in both sociology and psychology, it may be possible to gain more insight into the motivations behind dark tourism, as seen from the specific lens of these disciplines. Like other forms of tourism, modern dark tourism could possibly be motivated by the need to engage modernity and the modern condition, as articulated by MacCanell (1976, 2001). However, it could also be motivated not by strict natural laws, as in the structuralism present in MacCannell, but, rather, by subjective considerations. As suggested by the field of psychology, these many different motivations may be hierarchical and unchanging (Pearce, 1988, 1991) or a hierarchy where the order and importance of the stages are subject to change from person to person throughout their lives and travel careers (Pearce, 1992).

Given each of these insights one would expect that the motivations for dark tourism are diverse and specific to both the dark tourist experience considered and the evolutionary travel career of a given participant. However, empirical data must be collected in order to determine whether these various accounts offered up by these disciplines can be used to understand the motivations of dark tourists.

Many tourism researchers have provided various means to analyze the factors that can determine effective strategies to achieve the popularity of a certain tourist attraction. However, among the models reviewed for the purpose of this essay, the leisure ladder model (Pearce, 1988; 1991) and its subsequent replacement, the travel-needs model (Pearce, 1992) provided a better
understanding of the possible variations in dark tourism motivations, as opposed to strict theoretical constructs that rigidly defined these motivations, as in Dann (1998).

Chapter 2 articulated the history of dark tourism and the importance of understanding the motivations of dark tourism consumers. Prior research has concentrated on the suppliers of dark tourism; this has limited a comprehensive understanding of dark tourism, given that it is a phenomenon composed of at least two parties: the supplier and the consumer. Moreover, the research that has attempted to delineate the motivations of these consumers have concentrated primarily on a theoretical understanding of those reasons, which is understandable given the relative newness of dark tourism as an academic discipline.

However, to fully understand the motivations that drive these consumers to dark tourism, their lived experiences and perceptions must be examined using an empirical method and attempt to determine whether the motivations of dark tourism consumers are able to conform to the strict theoretical understanding of Dann (1998) or whether these motivations cannot be grouped under one absolute standard, that they vary from person to person as defined by their travel careers, as put forward by Pearce (1992). This study will, therefore, attempt to reveal the motivations that cause dark tourism consumers to engage in dark tourism, particularly the lighter shade of visiting celebrity gravesites. In this study, a phenomenological method will be used to highlight the lived experiences and perceptions that inform the dark tourism consumers’ desire to visit the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary, in Los Angeles, CA. The subsequent chapter will discuss in greater detail the research methods to be used in this proposed study.
Chapter 3 Research Methods and Design

Overview

The main purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences and perceptions of tourists that have visited the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at Los Angeles, CA. This study involved the use of in-depth interviews conducted through e-mail. An exploration of these experiences and motivation expands the current scholarly literature on dark tourism, and, furthermore, provides empirical information that helps the development of dark tourism sites in the United States. The research questions that guided this study in its purpose were as follows:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers that have led them to seek out Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

RQ2. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers that have led them to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

RQ3. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers regarding their expectations in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

RQ4. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers regarding the benefits they feel that they receive from visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?
Research Design

The research employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, as it was the most appropriate design for a study that sought to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of dark tourism consumers as related to their motivation to visit the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, California.

Phenomenological research involves the exploration of the subjective perceptions and experiences of a group of people using qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research allows for the examination of the lived experiences and perceptions of participants by using their own words to gain an understanding of their overall context (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Silverman, 2011).

This method was most appropriate given the fact that revealing the motivations of these consumers necessitates the gathering of new data that involves detailed examinations of a participant’s life experiences in order to illustrate the full essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2010). According to Salmon (2012), phenomenological designs are most appropriate when attempting to examine human experiences as they relate to a specific phenomenon, and how these experiences then create meaning in the participants.

Furthermore, the phenomenological design has been deemed most appropriate in research that attempts to get as close as possible to the experience of the participants, allowing others the clearest possible glimpse into phenomena that they may not have experienced (Sanders, 1982). Stone (2011) stated that, despite the obvious importance of the subjective experiences that motivate dark tourism consumers to engage in dark tourism, a lack of robust phenomenological studies exist on the topic. Cheal and Griffin (2013) revealed that the engagement of dark tourism consumers in Gallipoli were composed of highly personal connections to the place, indicating
that a research design that could accurately capture those highly personal connections should be chosen.

The inevitable differences, as well as the similarities, in the participants’ experiences—as evinced in the specific words and phrases they used—were thus revealed in more detail, ensuring that a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon was reached. Additionally, by employing an empirical kind of phenomenology, this present study can be replicated in the future, which could lead more credence to the findings of this study (Seidman, 2006).

**Data Collection**

The data for this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was collected through e-mail interviews with 11 dark tourism consumers who have visited the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe. Despite the increasing popularity of dark tourism, prior research has focused mainly on suppliers, which has resulted in limited understanding of this phenomenon, given that dark tourism is comprised of two parties: the supplier and the consumer. The data from consumers in this study is particularly interesting as most of the literature on consumer motivations for dark tourism is theoretical and does not empirically investigate the actual motivations of dark tourism consumers.

The chosen medium for interviews was e-mail, in order to accommodate the geographical distance that existed between the researcher and the participants, and to ensure that the data collected was not limited to only dark tourism consumers from a certain place, which may lead to possible influences stemming from their place of origin. This alternative to the traditional face-to-face or telephone interviews can lead to more opportunities for participant involvement and may enhance the inclusiveness of research data, as more participants may be reached (Ison, 2009). Email interviews can also be preferred to face to face or telephone interviews in situations
when asking about sensitive events, experiences, or personal characteristics (Kim et al, 2003) as may be the case with dark tourism participants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to further this study. Semi-structured interviews balance preplanned questions typical of a structured approach with the spontaneity and flexibility of unstructured interviews (Salmons, 2012). To this end, the researcher created a list of prepared questions and discussion topics in advance, submitted initial questions by email, then generated follow-up questions for subsequent interviews with the same participant based upon responses during the interview process itself. The use of semi-structured interviews was consistent with the phenomenological research design’s goal of understanding the experiences of the participants by giving them enough flexibility and openness to express themselves without being constrained by leading or closed-ended questions. This was important as email interviews can limit expression by not affording participants the ability to communicate through body language, inflection, and oral tone. In light of this limitation, a semi-structured, multi-interview approach was deemed appropriate to give participants more opportunity for greater expression through various types of questioning over time.

The predetermined interview questions and topics were formulated based on the possible motivations for dark tourism, especially the lighter types, offered by scholars, such as Biran (2011), Dann (1998), Russell (2010), Stone and Sharpley (2008), Tarlow (2005), and Zhou, Wildschut, Sedikides, Chen, and Vingerhoets. (2012). The interview questions probed the possible motivations offered by previous scholars. There was also a specific space in the interview for participants to provide any information they felt was important to share that was not addressed during the interview process itself. This was done to elicit a more full expression
of each participant’s experience, giving subjects another chance to communicate without closed ended or possibly leading lines of inquiry (Appendix C).

To execute the study’s semi-structured interview design, multiple interview sessions took place with all participants. Phenomenological studies often require lengthy or multiple interviews so that the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions are fully captured (King, 2004). If a concept or experience expressed during the initial interview is found to need more clarification, the researcher may conduct another interview with the participant concerned. With the extra time afforded for both the participant and the researcher, multiple interviews help facilitate a more in-depth reflection and understanding of the phenomenon at hand (Maguire, Stoddart, Flowers, McPhelim, & Kearney, 2014).

In this study, multiple interviews were conducted with each participant to seek clarification of prior statements and further explore insights revealed in the initial interview. The total time needed for the interview process varied according to the pace of each participant and the amount of follow up interviews needed to fully explore topics of interest. Consistent with a semi-structured approach, all participants were interviewed once with a set of predetermined questions then re-interviewed another 3 to 6 times with new questions that emerged during the interview process itself. Questions asked in follow up interviews were designed to seek clarification and probe areas of insight unique to each participant.

Approximately 50 potential candidates were initially approached by researcher for inclusion in the study. Contacts were obtained through a variety of methods: personal recruitment by the researcher in the cemetery, the posting of recruitment flyers in the neighborhood around the cemetery, and using social media networks such as Facebook, Marilyn Monroe fansites, and Yelp reviews, among others (Appendix A). This method of obtaining the
names and e-mails of potential participants ensured that participants (a) had already visited the 
gravesite of Marilyn Monroe and (b) were willing to let other people know that they have visited 
that site. After initial introduction of the project through the means discussed above, potential 
participants were contacted through e-mail in order to gain their consent, with the reassurance 
that they may opt out at any point in the research, and that the researcher will always be available 
for any of their questions or concerns.

The Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) was used to indicate participants’ willingness 
to be included in the study. This form provided participants with all the pertinent details 
regarding the data collection process, such as the time commitments required, and the contact 
information of the researcher for any questions or concerns. From this pool of initial contacts, 11 
participants were eventually chosen by the researcher for in depth interviews.

The use of small samples is justified in this research method, given that a comprehensive 
picture of the context is preserved (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Chapman & Smith, 2002). This is 
in line with the number of participants prescribed by Creswell (1998, p. 64), five to 25 
participants, and Morse (1994, p. 225), at least six participants. Englander (2012) made the point 
that the question of how many participants are needed for a qualitative study is irrelevant, given 
that the research is not quantitative, and as long as it accomplishes its goal—namely, to be able 
to “identify the essential structure of a phenomenon” (Englander, 2012, p. 23)—the number of 
participants can be malleable. As stated by Mason (2010), 10 interviews may be able to elicit 
richer data than 50 interviews if the interviewer establishes rapport with the participants and 
conducts a thorough interview. As a result of the fewer number of participants, more space may 
be given to the participants to convey their lived experiences and perceptions regarding the 
phenomena of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Given the possibility of various motivations for
dark tourism consumers, a research method that allows participants to speak their minds freely based on their own lived experiences and perceptions must be chosen (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Prospective participants were initially chosen based on convenience: the participants who indicate that they would be open to the time considerations of the research would be more preferred, as it would allow for more time to gain deeper information. While it is possible that the participants might not turn out to be representative of dark tourism consumers, this sampling was chosen as it is best suited for the time and resource constraints of the researcher, while being able to reach a diverse range of participants (Burke & Peper, 2002). After this, snowball sampling was also used to seek out other potential participants who may not have been physically present during the recruitment process. Marilyn Monroe gravesite visitors have created their own community, especially in the online space, so referrals by participants obtained through convenience sampling would prove helpful in order to try to obtain a wider range of participants (Kitto et al, 2008). By starting with a convenience sample and attempting to access a wider range of similar participants through snowball sampling, a more substantial data set can be achieved through the pursuit of maximum variation of participant experiences (Kitto, Chester, & Grbich, 2008). This model of initially using a convenience sampling as “seeds” for snowball sampling was noted by Magnani, Sabin, Saidel, and Heckathorn (2005) as useful for formative research and in problem definition.

After being chosen by the researcher for in depth interviews, the participants were informed that formal interviews would take place exclusively over email and that all e-mail exchanges would be copied into Microsoft Word to create verbatim interview transcripts to assist in the organization of data and data analysis. The 100% accuracy and ease of transcription by conducting interviews over email was one of the strongest benefits of using this approach.
Because chosen participants resided far away from the researcher, digital copies of consent forms were emailed to participants who reviewed the forms and returned signed copies through email and postal mail.

Participation was open to anyone so long as they were over the age of 21, and no other excluding criteria was used. Online data collection commenced on September 18, 2014 and lasted until February 28, 2015.

**Interview Recording**

Since interviews were conducted through the digital medium of e-mail, interview transcripts were easily produced by copying email content directly into Microsoft Word. This ensured that no errors in transcription occurred as the participants’ own words and phrases were copied directly into the final transcripts. The completed transcripts were saved as Microsoft Word documents for easier coding and analysis.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data collected in this study was conducted using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, the modified van Kaam method outlined by Moustakas (1994). More specifically, an empirical phenomenological method was utilized in order to better examine the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. By using the participants’ own words, a better understanding is gained on their experiences and the context that surrounds them (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Silverman, 2011). As emphasized by Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research methods focus on the wholeness of experience, instead of on specific parts. Therefore, meanings and essences are given primary importance, rather than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994).
In the modified van Kaam method of analysis by Moustakas (1994, p. 121), there are seven steps for analyzing the data from each participant:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping of every relevant experience. This step involved assigning a name or label for every relevant experience in the data in order to generate invariant constituents, or the smallest units of meaning. For example, the response “I personally feel connected to Marilyn Monroe as the actual person and not the icon” was labelled personal connection.

2. Reduction and elimination of extraneous data to capture essential constituents of the phenomenon. This step involved eliminating the invariant constituents that were developed from the preliminary listing because of the determination that they were not central to the phenomenon that was explored.

3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents to identify core themes of the experience. This step involved clustering invariant constituents that were related with each other into themes. For example, invariant constituents such as impressive, romantic, and adventure were grouped together as a cluster because they all pertained to the expectations regarding visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave.

4. Final identification and verification against the complete record of the research participant to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility. This involved multiple and thorough rereading of all interview transcripts to make sure identified clusters and themes were actually expressed and contained in the full record.

5. Construct for each co-researcher an individualized textural description of the experience based upon the verbatim transcripts using relevant and valid invariant
constituents and themes. This step involved constructing narrative details about how the participants experienced the phenomenon using their own words.

6. Construct for each co-researcher and an individual structural description of the experience based upon individual textural description and imaginative variation. This step involved integrating the structural qualities and themes that were generated from a different vantage point in such a way that the textural descriptions were transformed into a more abstract perspective.

7. Construct for each participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experiences. This final step was intended to generate a composite description representing the entire sample’s experience.

Smith and Firth (2011) emphasized that despite the diversity of qualitative methods, the data analysis is based on a common set of principles: “transcribing the interviews; immersing oneself within the data to gain detailed insights of the phenomena being explored; developing a data coding system; and linking codes or units of data to form overarching categories/themes which may lead to the development of theory.” (p. 3). Analysis was defined by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) as the systematic procedures to be done in order to reveal a given phenomenon’s essential aspects and associations.

The units of relevant meaning were examined so redundant units could be eliminated. The researcher accomplished this by considering both the literal content of the interview texts, that is, the number of significant times that meaning was mentioned, and the contexts in which they were stated, that is, its non-verbal or para-linguistic cues (Groenewald, 2004). The latter factor is essential given that the actual meaning of two units of meanings may appear similar at first glance, but might in fact be different given the contexts in which they were stated (Hycner,
These steps allowed for clusters of themes to be developed by the grouping of meaning units together (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then read and re-read the non-redundant units of meaning gleaned from the data, in order to arrive at the central themes that express its essence of the phenomenon (Hycner, 1999).

In order for this examination to be productive, the phenomenological steps of epoché and bracketing were executed. Epoché refers to the researcher’s examination of biases in order to remove all personal involvement in the phenomena being studied, which would lead to a clearer perception of the meanings behind the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). To accomplish this, the researcher wrote out a narrative of his own experiences visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave including an exploration of the motivations behind visits and experiences during visits. With this narrative written, the researcher reviews his personal account as he executes bracketing - a method that seeks to identify the researcher’s assumptions, biases, and beliefs that could hinder objective consideration of the data through (deMarrais & Lappan, 2004). After identification of these possible hindrances, the researcher consciously commits to setting them aside so as not to interfere with the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon in question. After executing these steps, phenomenological reduction occurs, where the phenomenon being examined is perceived as a whole, and an exhaustive description is given of its essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Through these steps, textural and structural descriptions were developed, shedding more light on composite textural and composite structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). What this means is that the individual experiences of the participants, once collected, could later illuminate on shared experiences or perceptions regarding the phenomenon, which was instrumental in the development of a synthesis of textural and structural meanings that could provide the essence of the phenomenon in question (Moustakas, 1994).
The execution of this approach is maximized when data sources are stored electronically (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Accordingly, as the researcher goes through these data sources—such as the initial email interview transcripts and the follow up email interview transcripts—it was possible to begin assigning code words and phrases that capture the essence of the content within. Once all data was coded in this manner, the researcher printed out the coded entries and began grouping the similar categories and re-assembling them under these new categories. Being careful to designate where each segment came from in the original transcript or other document, this method of organization makes it easy to spot patterns, make observations, and draw conclusions that form the basis of interpretation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

While Coffey and Atkinson (1996) maintained that no piece of computer software can, by itself, analyze the meaning of phenomena, the use of computer software packages can help expedite the analysis of text-based data through its capabilities for rapid searches and line-by-line coding (Kelle, 1995). While such software programs can help reduce the time needed for research, Groenewald (2004) emphasized that the final responsibility for interpreting the data will be on the researcher.

For this study, a coding scheme was developed using Nvivo qualitative computer analysis software. Nvivo was used to categorize the numerous responses of the participants into themes, patterns, concepts, and visuals to assist the researcher in looking for patterns and repetitive observations that would allow the drawing of tentative conclusions regarding the research questions. Nvivo software was chosen as it has been specifically designed for qualitative studies that seek to analyze texts and assign codes and themes to emerge by category and chronology (Savenye & Robinson, 2004). More specifically, this analysis helped draw out conclusions about
the motivating factors behind the dark tourism consumers who engage in the lighter shade of celebrity gravesite tourism.

Finally, the researcher used this analysis to write a composite summary that reflects the context from which the resulting themes have emerged (Moustakas, 1994). The participants’ own words were thus transformed and used to create essences that can be utilized in future research (Sadala & Adorno, 2001).

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology that was employed in this project; namely a qualitative empirical phenomenological research design. A discussion on the appropriateness of the chosen research design was also made. Included in this discussion were an outline of the data collection process and a description of how data was analyzed.
Chapter 4 Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding their motivations in visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA. This chapter presents the results of the analysis. The chapter will be organized to the following sections: (a) data analysis, (b) demographic information, (c) clusters and themes, (d) individual textural descriptions, (e) individual structural descriptions, and (f) individual textural-structural descriptions.

Data Analysis

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data, specifically the modified van Kaam method outlined by Moustakas (1994). An empirical phenomenological method was utilized to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants regarding their experiences visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe in Los Angeles. As emphasized by Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research methods focus on the wholeness of experience, instead of on specific parts. Therefore, meanings and essences are given primary importance, rather than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994).

In the modified van Kaam method of analysis by Moustakas (1994, p. 121), the following seven steps were used to analyze the interview data:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping of every relevant experience.
2. Reduction and elimination of extraneous data to capture essential constituents of the phenomenon
3. Clustering and thematizing the Invariant Constituents to identify core themes of the experience.
4. Final identification and verification against the complete record of the research participant to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility.

5. Construct for each co-researcher an individualized textural description of the experience based upon the verbatim transcripts using relevant and valid invariant constituents and themes.

6. Construct for each co-researcher and an individual structural description of the experience based upon individual textural description and imaginative variation.

7. Construct for each participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experiences.

Nvivo software was used to store and organize data. The software is not capable of analyzing the data for clusters and themes without the actual analysis of the researcher. The researcher performed the actual analysis by examining the content of the data for themes and similarities. The Nvivo software was helpful in making the data analysis organized and more accurate because all data were stored in single location that allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the content of the individual interviews.

Demographic Information

The sample for this study consisted of 11 participants, six of whom were men and five were women. Two of the participants belonged in the over 50 age group, five participants were in the over 40 age group, three participants were part of the over 30 age group, and only one participant belonging in the over 70 age group. In terms of occupation, two were unemployed and two were government employees. Other participants were administrative assistant, publicist, film editor, film critic, hairdresser, and a retiree. In terms of city of residence, two participants lived in Los Angeles, two participants lived in Littleton, and the others lived in San Francisco,
Las Vegas, Denver, Burbank, Quebec, Encino, and New Mexico. The complete demographic profile of the sample is shown in Table 1 with additional background information on each participant presented in the appendix (Appendix D).

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Information</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government employee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film editor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film critic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littleton</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burbank</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encino</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=11*
Clusters and Themes

Cluster and themes were developed by grouping together invariant constituents that were thematically related. These clusters represent a broad set of ideas, subsumed by smaller interrelated units of meaning. The invariant constituents that received the most number of coded data became the theme for each cluster. Based on the analysis performed, several clusters and themes were developed, central to understanding the experience of the participants. These thematic clusters include the following: (a) significant first impression, (b) connection, (c) motivation, (d) preparation, (e) expectations, (f) actual experience, (g) activities, (h) benefits, and (i) personal reflections. The presentation of the results will be aided by illustrative figures showing the coding results and direct quotes from the participants to provide support for the themes.

Significant first impression. The first cluster was labelled significant first impression, pertaining to the experiences of the participants regarding the first time that Marilyn Monroe made a significant impression on them. The main theme that emerged from the data was that Marilyn Monroe made a significant impression on the participants upon seeing her pictures when they were young. Other significant first impression reported by the participants included seeing her in movies, film class, family, and writing class. Figure 1 shows the coding results for the cluster significant first impression.
The main theme that emerged from the data was that Marilyn Monroe made a significant and memorable impression on the participants before they ever visited her grave. Many of the participants were instantly struck by her beauty when they first saw a picture of Marilyn Monroe. Participant 10 spoke about being enchanted with her beauty upon seeing a photo of Marilyn Monroe in a neighbor’s house,

I remember being a young kid growing up to a gay couple who lived next door. Inside the entrance to their home was a large framed print of Marilyn Monroe holding a Chanel perfume bottle. The print was almost life size so it really made an impression. The bottom of the print was marked with the signature “Marilyn Monroe” in hot pink neon. I remember she looked sexy and glamorous in a way most women don’t look today, especially not any women in my family. I also remember thinking it was weird for two gay guys to have a picture of a hot woman hanging in their house.

Participant 5 also spoke about how pictures of Marilyn Monroe were everywhere when she was young, “I remember seeing many images of her when I was younger, maybe middle school age 12 or 13. I thought she was very pretty, but I didn’t think much about her past that”. Participant 6 shared that his father used to collect pictures of Marilyn Monroe,
My dad was a huge fan. He had calendars of Marilyn Monroe and magazines. I mean I got it she was sexy. It used to get on my mom’s nerves, but he didn’t stop getting her stuff. He just started keeping it in the garage. My friends and I would go through my dad’s stuff. Mainly the Playboy’s he kept in the garage. I know he had the Playboy that Marilyn was in.

Similar to the other participants, Marilyn Monroe made an impression on Participant 7 upon seeing her photo in a coffee table book,

My first exposure to Marilyn Monroe was at Christmas time. A relative of mine bought me a coffee table book filled with pictures of Marilyn from throughout her life. I don’t remember who bought me the book but I really remember the pictures in the book well. Being a young boy of about 11, it was probably my first time I had access to an entire book of pictures of a beautiful woman.

**Connection.** The second cluster was labelled connection, pertaining to the connection that the participants felt with Marilyn Monroe. The themes that emerged from the data were that participants either felt a deep emotional connection with Marilyn Monroe, whereas other did not have any personal connection with her. Other responses that emerged from the data included artistic connection, viewed as an American icon, business opportunity for selling memorabilia, role model, and spiritual connection. Figure 2 shows the coding results for the cluster connection.
One theme that emerged from the data was that participants felt a deep emotional connection with Marilyn Monroe. Participant 1 spoke about how she felt connected to Marilyn Monroe as a human being, relating to her ability to put on a persona,

I personally feel connected to Marilyn Monroe as the actual person and not the icon. Marilyn Monroe herself used to say “Well I have to put her on” when she was settling into her make up chair. That’s what people don’t get. Even though I believe Marilyn was an innocent girl in a man’s world, she knew the deal. She knew she was still Norma Jean and Marilyn Monroe was a part she was playing. She knew how to use what she had to get what she wanted.

Another participant spoke about feeling connected to Marilyn Monroe’s wounds and traumas, relating to her childhood experiences. Participant 8 shared:

I think people relate to her as a wounded person. She was abandoned at a young age and the scars of that childhood left a lasting shadow that hung over her for her entire life. I think most people face problems and issues in their childhood that can leave them feeling less than worthy of kindness and affection. That’s the part of Marilyn’s life I think people
relate to the most. The idea that past traumas can creep into your adult life and that even the most beautiful and talented among us are still human beings with histories and tragedies of our own to overcome.

Participant 7 related most to Marilyn’s quest for love, reinforcing the belief that everyone needs the same thing regardless of whether a person is a celebrity or not,

For me, Marilyn’s life is a testament to the fact that none of us are really all that different. No matter how rich or how smart or how sexy any of us are, we all still just want to be loved and when we don’t get that love we fall into doubt and despair. I think that’s really interesting and something that I can relate to personally with Marilyn’s life story.

Conversely, another set of participants reported not experiencing any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. Participant 9 said: “I don’t have too much of an opinion or feelings on Marilyn Monroe’s live and death. She seems like a typical Hollywood starlet to me”. Participant 3 also reported not feeling nay personal connection with Marilyn Monroe,

Marilyn has not been a part of my life. I of course am very aware of her because she was famous. I would not say she is particularly important to me. I know a little about her life and how she died.

Motivation. The third cluster was labelled motivation, pertaining to the motivation of the participants for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The main theme that emerged from the data was that tourist curiosity was the motivation for most participants in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Other responses that emerged from the data included fandom, bonding with a friend, legitimize business of selling Marilyn Monroe memorabilia, fond of visiting cemeteries, experience deeper connection, and seeing celebrities. Figure 3 shows the coding results for the cluster motivation.
The main theme that emerged from the data was that tourist curiosity was the motivation for most participants in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 4 spoke about knowing that Marilyn Monroe’s grave is open to the public, which was a motivation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave, “I heard through a friend at school that she was buried in a cemetery open to the public. I thought she might be wrong, but I still got the details and decided I would check it out”. Participant 1 spoke about visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite because it is free, Whether you visit there or live there you are always looking for free stuff to do in California. That is why my friends and I ditched class and went to the cemetery. We did not have any money between us, but we did not want to be in school or go home, so we went somewhere free that you could hang out.

Participant 9 also spoke about visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite because of curiosity, Even though I have lived in LA for a large part of my life I did not think too much about Marilyn Monroe’s grave or if I would ever visit it. I am a TV critic and after attending a
conference for TV critics in LA, a friend and I decided we were over being around live stars and decided to visit some dead ones.

Other motivating factor for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was being a fan of her. Participant 11 spoke about being a fan of Marilyn Monroe for a long time, wanting to visit her gravesite for a long time,

I want to go to Marilyn’s grave for such a long time. I finally had the opportunity to go in 1999 when I was traveled on the West Coast of San Francisco to Los Angeles. I saw Marilyn’s house and crypt on this trip. It was like seeing her first house and her final house. It was very special to me and I take lot of pictures. I also saw her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. This trip was very short, but I made sure to come back to better see her again.

Participant 2 also shared being wanting to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite ever since she was a young fan,

I wanted to go to Marilyn Monroe’s grave when I was thirteen years old and first became a fan. However, at the time I thought of course this would be impossible. I envisioned Marilyn Monroe’s grave would be on a private estate. Open only to family and close friends of the family. I never in my wildest dreams thought that it was open to the public.

**Preparation.** The fourth cluster was labelled preparation, pertaining to the type of preparation that the participants did before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The themes that emerged from the data was that participants either did not have any preparation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave or performed some research through the internet. Other responses that emerged from the data included little preparation, being with Marilyn Monroe’s life through
movies and books, and bringing food to the grave. Figure 4 shows the coding results for the cluster preparation.

![Figure 4. Coding results for the preparation cluster.]

One of the themes that emerged from the data was that participants did not have any preparation before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 6 said: “No big plans for our first trip. My brother just told me and my wife one day that he would take us if we were interested”. Another participant spoke about not doing any preparation before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, Participant 5 shared:

I was not aware I was visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite when my friend took me in 2002. I thought I was just seeing the highlights of Los Angeles and therefore I did not do any special preparations for the trip.

Another theme that emerged from the data was that the participants performed some research through the internet before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 8 shared about doing some research online to prepare visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, “Research involved
first, finding the location of the cemetery, and second, finding the location of Marilyn’s crypt. I was able to seek out information on both questions from the internet”. Another participant spoke about finding information about the location of the cemetery by researching online, Participant 10 said:

I remember looking online to get an address for the Chinese Theater then spending a good 30 minutes or so looking up Marilyn’s cemetery and trying to find info on what other stars were buried there. I remember finding a site that had pics of Rodney Dangerfield’s stone and Mel Blanc’s stone too. After about 1 hour of research online I knew Westwood was the best spot to see celebrity graves in LA.

Participant 7 also found the internet helpful with regard to the preparation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite,

Getting ready for the trip was easy with the help of the internet. It was the early 2000s and the internet was really starting to blossom. Because of the internet I was able to act more easily on what otherwise may have been just a passing desire to visit the grave. I remember finding the address of the cemetery with surprising ease.

Expectations. The fifth cluster was labelled expectations, pertaining to the expectations that the participants had with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The theme that emerged from the data was that participants expected an impressive grave of Marilyn Monroe. Other responses that emerged from the data included being buried in a private estate, lots of people visiting her grave, public attraction, difficult to find, romantic, adventure, and no expectations. Figure 5 shows the coding results for the cluster expectations.
The theme that emerged from the data was that participants expected an impressive grave of Marilyn Monroe. Because of Marilyn Monroe’s reputation as a glamorous actress and icon, many of the participants were expecting that her gravesite would match that same glamour. Participant 10 shared:

I really expected to be surrounding with an over the top setting where you could get close but not too close. I thought I would feel like I was in the presence of Hollywood royalty and might have to fight off at least a few other fans to get my turn to walk up to the grave. I expected to feel overwhelmed and blown away by the magnitude of the space.

Participant 2 expected to see a gravesite that is understated but elegant, which she attributed to Marilyn Monroe’s persona,

Because of the kind of person Marilyn was I figured her stone would be understated, but classy and elegant just like her. I thought she would have a tombstone that was flat on the ground and not standing up. I imagined she would have a white stone that had her
real name, date of birth and death in very elegant font. Instead of a vase with flowers, there would be flowers planted throughout the field where her grave was located. Participant 5 echoed the same expectation, anticipating to be impressed with Marilyn Monroe’s tombstone,

I think if you would have asked me what Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite is like I would have said it is an enormous tombstone, possibly a statue of her and has never been seen by the public. I would have thought it was in a garden with a ton of flowers to reflect her femininity in life.

Participant 7 also spoke about expecting a larger than life tombstone to match Marilyn Monroe’s iconic stature,

I was expecting to see a plot in the ground and a massive stone marking the grave. I thought her grave might be near water or a large tree, probably because that seemed more impressive in my own mind. I expected it to be glamorous and larger than life, just like the woman.

**Actual experience.** The sixth cluster was labelled actual experience, pertaining to the actual experience of the participants with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The themes that emerged from the data was experiencing fascination and surprise upon seeing Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, feeling connected, and feeling emotional. Other responses that emerged from the data included feeling like visiting a family, part of an itinerary, nothing special, and uneasy. Figure 6 shows the coding results for the cluster actual experiences.
One theme that emerged from the data was experiencing fascination and surprise upon seeing Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Many of the participants were surprised and fascinated about her tombstone, including the people who visited her. For instance, Participant 10 expressed surprise when she found out that her tombstone was modest and simple,

I was really surprised with what Marilyn’s grave looked like. It was very simple and it was actually in a wall. I was under the impression that it would be in a massive vault like the old time family graves or would at least be located inside a mausoleum. It is totally and completely open to the public, the sun shines directly on her tomb and she is surrounded by a bunch of no name people. That was a real shocker. Although simple, it is still very elegant and feminine.

Similarly, Participant 11 was surprised that nobody was in her gravesite and that it looked different from the footage that was shown in the past.

Figure 6. Coding results for the actual experience cluster.
There was no one else in there. I walked right around the corner and into Marilyn’s crypt. Even with all the footage I had seen of her crypt I was surprise how close I was standing to Marilyn. Everything looked so different from the footage.

Participant 5 expressed surprise when she realized that she could get really close to Marilyn Monroe’s crypt and touch it. She said it was strange that she could feel really close to Marilyn Monroe,

I remember being shocked that you could just walk up to the face of her crypt. I remember seeing how the stone on the face of her crypt was a different color than the one’s surrounding her. I was surprised that I could touch the face of her crypt. I remember thinking that this is so strange to technically be this close to Marilyn Monroe. Someone who if she were alive I could never get this close to, or if I did I would quickly be removed by her many bodyguards.

Similarly, Participant 6 was also surprised when he realized that he could touch Marilyn Monroe’s grave. He was also surprised to find out that people left gifts in her tomb,

I did not think you could walk right up to her grave and touch it. I did not think people would be leaving stuff at her grave still. I thought of her fans as the people who bought the stuff I put on Ebay. I did not think these same people would also be visiting her grave and leaving personal stuff behind for her.

Participant 9 was also surprised to find out how the cemetery was not highly secured by guards and that people can easily access Marilyn Monroe’s grave,

My first feeling was surprise. Westwood Village is oddly located, it’s just off the UCLA campus and you walk thru a skyscraper’s parking garage to get into the back gates of the cemetery. Also, there was no line or security to get into the park. The park is very small
and the grounds were nicely kept. It was very easy even without the help of our map to find Marilyn Monroe and the other famous residents in Westwood Village.

Other participants felt connected to Marilyn Monroe when they visited her grave and felt emotional. Participant 2 shared: “I felt paralyzed by my emotions and I just decided to sit and observe her grave and her visitors”. Participant 11 spoke about wanting to talk to Marilyn Monroe but could not say anything because of being overwhelmed with emotions,

I wanted to say something to her, but I couldn’t. I feel like I stood there for hours, but I don’t know how long. I had so many feelings. I felt so close to Marilyn and I did not know what to do.

Participant 8 shared how emotional it was to have the place alone,

It was pretty emotional. Luckily it was a beautiful spring/summer day during the middle of the week. No one else was around so I got to experience it all on my own. I was very thankful for that. It was a personal experience and something that meant a lot to me. I don’t think it would have been the same if the place was climbing with tourists.

**Activities.** The seventh cluster was labelled activities, pertaining to the activities that the participants did when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The participants in the study reported doing different activities in Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite that included observing her grave, taking pictures, greeting Marilyn Monroe, taking in their heads, and discussing Marilyn Monroe’s life. Figure 7 shows the coding results for the cluster activities.
The participants in the study reported doing different activities in Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite that included observing her grave, taking pictures, greeting Marilyn Monroe, taking in their heads, and discussing Marilyn Monroe’s life. When Participant 10 arrived at Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, she just observed her grave and inspect the details of her tomb,

I just stood there for the longest time taking in the scene, noting the stone bench nearby and paying attention to the little things like the color of her crypt stone and the exact year she died. After about five minutes I finally approached the grave and ran my fingers over her name plaque. I distinctly remember thinking that my hand was no more than inches away from her coffin and that leading me to think about the last time I’d been so close to a coffin.

Participant 5 provided a detailed account of the activities that she did when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, which lasted 30-45 minutes,
The first thing I did was touch the face of her crypt. I did not do this for a long period of time, maybe 30 seconds or so. I didn’t want to touch the lipstick marks covering the face of her crypt. The second thing I did was compare the color of her stone to the others surrounding her. I stood back so I could see the entire wall in my field of vision. Probably did this for a minute or so. Then I read the names of the people surrounding Marilyn Monroe’s crypt to see if they were famous also. I don’t recall seeing anyone else famous. The last thing I did was inspect the coins placed in that space between her crypt and the one above hers. I remember being surprised at the countries some of these coins were from. People had traveled long distances to come and see Marilyn Monroe’s grave. This probably took me 5 to 10 minutes, because there were so many coins. The last thing I did before leaving was discuss the gravesite with my friend. I think we did this for 30 to 45 minutes.

Participant 9 also reported diligently observing the details of Marilyn Monroe’s grave,

I surveyed the entire scene initially. Checking out the grounds and taking note of things I found odd or interesting, for example the lack of security. I also thought it was unique that you could park inside the park without paying. While in front of Marilyn’s grave I tried to take note of the details. For example, the color of the stone, the marker and the flowers. I studied the stones surrounding Marilyn’s so I could compare the look and feel I got from them.

Other visitors took pictures of Marilyn Monroe’s grave, such as Participant 11 who shared,
I felt the urge to kiss her stone too, but I was too nervous. I just pulled out my camera and took pictures. I took pictures of everything up close and far away. I meant to ask someone to take a picture of me standing next to her crypt, but no one ever showed up.

Other people talked to Marilyn in their heads, especially when there were no people around.

Participant 1 shared talking to Marilyn in her head about different things that she wanted to say to her,

I continue to talk to Marilyn in my head or sometimes out loud. Again, this also depends on if people are around. If there are people around sometimes when I talk out loud, they respond or ask me what I am doing, which I hate. I am visiting my family and it’s none of their business. My talks with Marilyn are nothing too heavy. If I have learned something new about her that week I will usually tell her about that. If something happened to me that week good or bad, I talk to her about that. If I am feeling sad about her dying or not ever having the chance to meet her in person I talk about that. This conversation with Marilyn can go on for hours.

Participant 7 also shared that being in her grave was an opportunity to discuss Marilyn Monroe’s life,

I remember having a really in depth conversation about Marilyn right in front of her grave. We talked about all of the 1000s of people who had stood right there before us. We talked about how much love there still was for Marilyn and how sad it was that Marilyn took her own life.

**Benefits.** The eight cluster was labelled benefits, pertaining to the perceived benefits of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The main theme that emerged from the data was that participants perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave made them feel connected to her.
Other themes that emerged from that data were the benefit of having the opportunity to contemplate about life and experience adventure. Other responses that emerged from the data included meeting other fans, understanding the power of celebrity to other people, and experiencing peace. Figure 8 shows the coding results for the cluster benefits.

![Figure 8. Coding results for the benefits cluster.](image)

The main theme that emerged from the data was that participants perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave made them feel connected to her. Participant 11 spoke about feeling connected and close to Marilyn Monroe,

I got to feel closer to Marilyn. Before I think that watching her movies, reading books about her and collecting her stuff made me close, but I was wrong. Visiting her crypt and being surrounded by other people who share the same love as I do for her made me close to her. I still have not been able to say anything to Marilyn when I visit her, but I think we are still close.

Participant 2 spoke about experiencing real connection when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite,
I get to have a real connection with Marilyn that would not have been possible if she were alive. I feel like I am able to get up close and personal with the real person and not the movie star. It’s a very intimate experience knowing that she is right there on the other side of the wall.

Participant 8 also spoke about experiencing a deeper connection to an icon that continues to be relevant,

For me though, it’s definitely about experiencing a deeper connection that just observing her body of work. It’s about actually being there with her and knowing that being in her presence is an amazing gift especially considering she’s been gone now for over 50 years.

Another theme that emerged from that data was the benefit of having the opportunity to contemplate about life. Participant 10 shared:

I got a chance to reflect on my own life and connect to a deceased person that meant a lot to me. I got to reflect on things I hadn’t thought of for years and to walk away with an appreciation for the way I hope to be remembered. I thought about life, death, and what it all amounts to when you’re gone.

Participant 1 shared how visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite gave her an opportunity to discuss her inner thoughts, which is something she cannot always do,

When I visit Marilyn I am visiting my family. I am able to discuss my inner thoughts and desires with Marilyn and express my true feelings about her and my own life. I am not able to do this anywhere else.

Other participants viewed visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite in a less personal experience. Another theme that emerged from that data was the benefit of experiencing adventure as a result of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 6 shared:
When I visit Marilyn Monroe’s grave it’s just an interesting and kind of odd experience. It’s interesting because she is someone who was very famous and I collect her items so I have learned about her to make better sales. It’s odd because of how the people react to someone they never even knew.

Similarly, Participant 7 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite as an interesting adventure,

I also think Marilyn’s grave also gives me an interesting adventure to share with people I care about. When I get visitors from out of town I always take them to the cemetery. This is because I know it will be something they can’t experience outside of LA. LA has such a celebrity culture at its core that visitors are always expecting to do something “Hollywood”.

**Personal reflection.** The ninth cluster was labelled personal reflections, pertaining to the personal reflections that the participants had when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The theme that emerged from the data was that participants experienced reflecting about mortality when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Other participants did not engage in any personal reflection when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Other responses that emerged from the data included reflections about their careers, past experiences, making money, and finding love. Figure 9 shows the coding results for the cluster personal reflections.
Figure 9. Coding results for the personal reflections cluster.

The theme that emerged from the data was that participants experienced reflecting about mortality when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Participant 3 shared:

I often think about my own death when I visit a cemetery. I think about the words that will be on my stone when I die. I don’t feel it’s right to pick my own words, but I do try to put ideas in my family’s heads.

Participant 4 echoed the same sentiment and spoke about reflecting on mortality every time he visits a cemetery,

I feel this way whenever I visit a grave or go to a funeral. I am getting at that age where people would not be surprised if I went so it’s hard not to think about it. I think about how I am going to die. If it will be quick or if I will be rotting in a home for a while. I hope it will be quick and I won’t see it coming.

Participant 1 shared that after her friend died, visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite made her think more about mortality,
I never thought of myself dying when I visited Marilyn until Joe died. Now I do think about my own death a lot. I am not afraid of dying, because I will have Marilyn and Joe on the other side. I am not sure what the other side is. I am not a very religious person, but I do believe in God and I do believe there is some type of heaven. I know that both Joe and Marilyn are in heaven. They are together I bet. Drinking champagne and eating potato chips. And I know that when I die I will be right there with them.

Participant 7 spoke about reflecting on her death and how she wanted to be remembered when she is gone,

I’ve thought about my own mortality. I’ve thought about how I want people to love me like the way they love Marilyn long after I’m gone. I don’t have a wife or kids as yet, but I know that’s something that is important to me. I want to have a legacy and I want to be remembered. I want to be buried and not cremated so people have a place to come visit me.

Participant 9 explained that thinking about mortality is natural when an individual visits a cemetery,

I think its human nature to think about dying and your own mortality when you visit a cemetery. You are surrounded by death and the symbols of those that have passed on. You can walk around and see details about the deceased lives.

Other participants did not engage in any personal reflection when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 8 clarified that he does not reflect on his own life when he visits Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, instead, he thinks about Marilyn Monroe’s life and death, “When I visit, it isn’t really about me or my feelings. I don’t really think about my own death much at all.
I really just think about Marilyn’s life and her death, not really my own”. Participant 11 also noted how she only thinks of Marilyn Monroe when she visits her gravesite,

It’s hard to think about yourself when you are at Marilyn’s crypt. You are only thinking about her and her past and her life and death. All the people around you are sometimes talking about the past, but it is still related to Marilyn. It will be about how they first became a fan of Marilyn or a memory they have a Marilyn. The whole time is very focused on Marilyn. Marilyn is the reason you all are there so that is what I think everyone focuses on.

**Individual Textural Descriptions**

In this section, the individual textural descriptions for each participant are provided. The individual textural descriptions provide a description of the experience of the participants using their own words. The construction of these descriptions were based on identifying the response of each participant in every cluster that was developed and using their own words to generate a coherent narrative of their experience of the phenomenon. For example, the experience of Participant 1 in the cluster connection, was personal connection. A narrative was generated to explicitly identify that Participant 1 felt a deep personal connection with Marilyn Monroe, followed by a supporting quote from the raw data. These descriptions are instrumental in developing the essence of the experience of each participant.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she attended a writing class. The nature of the connection that Participant 1 felt with Marilyn Monroe was deep emotional connection,

I personally feel connected to Marilyn Monroe as the actual person and not the icon. Marilyn Monroe herself used to say “Well I have to put her on” when she
was settling into her make up chair. That’s what people don’t get. Even though I believe Marilyn was an innocent girl in a man’s world, she knew the deal.

The motivation of Participant 1 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to bond with a friend and to do something for free. She said:

Whether you visit there or live there you are always looking for free stuff to do in California. That is why my friends and I ditched class and went to the cemetery. We did not have any money between us, but we did not want to be in school or go home, so we went somewhere free that you could hang out.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 1 brought some food and immersed herself with Marilyn Monroe’s life though her movies and books. The expectations of Participant 1 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that her grave would be open to the public, “I knew that her grave was open to the public. I assumed that the grounds of the cemetery would be well kept because I knew other famous people, including Marilyn, who were buried there”.

The actual experience of Participant 1 regarding visiting her grave was that it felt like visiting a family for her, “When I visit Marilyn I am visiting family. I almost always cry when I am visiting Marilyn now, but I try to end all visits on a happy note.” Some of the activities performed during the visit included greeting Marilyn Monroe, having a picnic, and talking in her head. She said: “After I have greeted Marilyn, I walk directly over to the lawn across from her grave. I always bring champagne and potato chips. I spread a blanket out on the lawn and I sit.”

Participant 1 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gives her an opportunity to contemplate about life,
When I visit Marilyn I am visiting my family. I am able to discuss my inner thoughts and desires with Marilyn and express my true feelings about her and my own life. I am not able to do this anywhere else.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 1 shared that she thought about mortality when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite,

I never thought of myself dying when I visited Marilyn until Joe died. Now I do think about my own death a lot. I am not afraid of dying, because I will have Marilyn and Joe on the other side.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she enrolled in film class and through her family. The nature of the connection that Participant 2 felt with Marilyn Monroe was that she was a role model for her and feels a spiritual and personal connection with her, especially about being misunderstood, “Much like Marilyn was in her life, I feel misunderstood by people and find it hard to connect and form real relationships”. The motivation of Participant 2 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that she was a fan of hers,

I wanted to go to Marilyn Monroe’s grave when I was thirteen years old and first became a fan. However, at the time I thought of course this would be impossible. I envisioned Marilyn Monroe’s grave would be on a private estate. Open only to family and close friends of the family. I never in my wildest dreams thought that it was open to the public.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 2 did very little preparation,

I did very little to prepare for my first trip. I was moving away from home for the first time. I had stayed up all night the night before packing. I had
underestimated the amount of time it would take to pack up all my belongings and
I was packing till the last minute.

The expectations of Participant 2 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave
involved seeing an impressive gravesite,

Because of the kind of person Marilyn was I figured her stone would be
understated, but classy and elegant just like her. I thought she would have a
tombstone that was flat on the ground and not standing up. I imagined she would
have a white stone that had her real name, date of birth and death in very elegant
font. Instead of a vase with flowers, there would be flowers planted throughout
the field where her grave was located.

The actual experience of Participant 2 involved feeling connected to her and emotional,
“I was amazed by the closeness I felt to Marilyn in that moment and as I reluctantly left, I knew
that I would return”. Some of the activities performed by Participant 2 during her visit included
bringing gifts, cleaning her tomb, observing other people, and talking in her head about Marilyn
Monroe,

Being that close to Marilyn made me feel this bond even more. I felt so close to
Marilyn in that moment. I started to talk to her in my head, which is something
that I never did before. I told Marilyn how I felt about her. I told her how similar
our lives were. I told her how I was sorry she was murdered and I wish that I
could have saved her.

Participant 2 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it
gave her the opportunity to connect with Marilyn Monroe,
I get to have a real connection with Marilyn that would not have been possible if she were alive. I feel like I am able to get up close and personal with the real person and not the movie star. It’s a very intimate experience knowing that she is right there on the other side of the wall.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 2 shared that when she visited Marilyn’s gravesite, she reflected about her own career and personal past experiences.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she first saw a picture of her. Participant 3 did not feel any connection with Marilyn Monroe, Marilyn has not been a part of my life. I of course am very aware of her because she was famous. I would not say she is particularly important to me. I know a little about her life and how she died.

The motivation of Participant 3 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that she was fond of visiting cemeteries,

I know that this may seem morbid, but I really enjoy visiting cemeteries. It’s not really about seeing celebrities but it’s about reading the tombstones. I find it interesting to see the words of remembrance people have decided to carve into the stone of their loved ones.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 3 did not make any significant preparation. The expectations of Participant 3 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that it would be difficult to find, “I didn’t think too much about Marilyn’s grave before I visited it. I thought it would be a lot harder to find where she was at then it was”. The actual experience of Participant 3 involved feeling uneasy because she was with her boyfriend who did not know that she had a fascination with cemeteries,
My first visit was anticlimactic. I was still a little uneasy around my boyfriend because the relationship was so new. I didn’t get to do my usual thing while we were in the cemetery. I usually try to read all of the tombstones I can when I visit a cemetery. Since I was with someone that didn’t know my ritual I just stuck to the most elaborate graves to see if I found particularly special words for someone.

When Participant 3 visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, she read the tombstones of several people buried in that cemetery, “I was surprised she didn’t have any phrases or special words on her stone. It was just very simple plaque with her name, birth year and death year”. Participant 3 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave her an opportunity to reflect about life,

I like to read the words of remembrance people have decided to put on the stones of their past loved ones. I feel you can get a lot of life lessons from the dead and I try to take these away with me when I visit a cemetery.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 3 shared that she thought about mortality when she visited Marilyn’s grave,

I often think about my own death when I visit a cemetery. I think about the words that will be on my stone when I die. I don’t feel it’s right to pick my own words, but I do try to put ideas in my family’s heads.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw her in movies,

When I first saw her on the drive-in movie screen I know I was already aware of her, but it felt like the first time I saw her. She was such a woman. I thought she
was the whole package, sexy and soft-spoken. I thought I need to get me a
woman like that one day.

Participant 4 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation
of Participant 4 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity, “I heard through a friend at
school that she was buried in a cemetery open to the public. I thought she might be wrong, but I
still got the details and decided I would check it out”. To prepare for that visit, Participant 4 did
not do any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 4 with regard to visiting
Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that she would be buried in a private estate,

I knew she was buried in California, but I did not know exactly where she was. I
figured being as famous as she was she would be buried in a private area of some
fancy cemetery where people needed to show ID to a guard or have a key to get
in. I heard through a friend at school that she was buried in a cemetery open to
the public.

The actual experience of Participant 4 was nothing special, “My first visit was very short
and I don’t remember any special feelings while I was there”. Participant 4 did not stay very
long, but he took some pictures when he visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Participant 4
perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it was something
interesting to do. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 4 shared that he reflected about
mortality and his personal past experiences,

I think about my life too. I think about the mistakes I have made. In particular I
think about how hard the divorce was on my kids. I think about if maybe my ex
and I could have worked it out how things would be different. The ways things
are I will die alone so I think about how that one decision to end my marriage changed my life.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she first saw a picture of her and through film classes,

> My first experience with Marilyn Monroe past an image in a magazine was in a college Intro to Film class I took when I was 21 years old. In class, we watched great movies in a particular period of time. For the 1950’s we watched “Some Like It Hot”. I wasn’t even aware at the time that Marilyn Monroe was in “Some Like It Hot”, but I had heard the movie title referenced before in the movie “Clueless”. I was very interested in seeing the movie once I knew that Marilyn Monroe was the star. We screened the film in class and after had a short discussion.

Participant 5 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 5 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity. To prepare for that visit, Participant 5 did not make any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 5 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that it would be impressive and closed to the public. The actual experience of Participant 5 involved being fascinated and feeling connected with Marilyn Monroe,

> I remember thinking that this is so strange to technically be this close to Marilyn Monroe. Someone who if she were alive I could never get this close to, or if I did I would quickly be removed by her many bodyguards.

One of the main things that Participant 5 did during her visit was to observe her grave,
The first thing I did was touch the face of her crypt. I did not do this for a long period of time, maybe 30 seconds or so. I didn’t want to touch the lipstick marks covering the face of her crypt. The second thing I did was compare the color of her stone to the others surrounding her. I stood back so I could see the entire wall in my field of vision. Probably did this for a minute or so. Then I read the names of the people surrounding Marilyn Monroe’s crypt to see if they were famous also. I don’t recall seeing anyone else famous. The last thing I did was inspect the coins placed in that space between her crypt and the one above hers. I remember being surprised at the countries some of these coins were from. People had traveled long distances to come and see Marilyn Monroe’s grave. This probably took me 5 to 10 minutes, because there were so many coins. The last thing I did before leaving was discuss the gravesite with my friend. I think we did this for 30 to 45 minutes.

Participant 5 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave her a better understanding of the power of celebrity,

I got a greater understanding for the level of devotion a fan can have for a celebrity. I think it’s amazing the level of commitment these people had to making visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite a part of their life. I think it would be unhealthy to have this much devotion for a deceased loved one, and I find it very disturbing for complete strangers to have this level of devotion.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 5 did not engage in any personal reflections when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.
Participant 6. Participant 6’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw pictures of her. The nature of the connection that Participant 6 felt with Marilyn Monroe was business opportunity to sell merchandise,

One guy traded Marilyn Monroe stamps for my wife and I to clean his apartment. I was able to sell those on Ebay for $50, which wasn’t bad for cleaning a one-bedroom apartment. I started looking for Marilyn Monroe and other famous people items on Ebay to see what items were the most valuable. Dolls of Marilyn Monroe were really big, and if you could get your hands on anything Elvis. My wife and I started selling items on Ebay as a side business to the house cleaning. We even started telling people we would take cash or trade. So I won’t say Marilyn Monroe has been important to me, but I do spend a lot of time trying to find stuff related to her so I can sell it. I mean I have a wife. I’m not like these Immortal Marilyn fan club assholes who acts like they knew her. I have learned a lot about her so I can write good descriptions for the stuff I get, or if I’m trying to sell something of hers to a customer.

The motivation of Participant 6 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to legitimize his business and to satisfy his curiosity,

The first time I went to Marilyn Monroe’s grave was when my wife and I went out to California for my niece’s graduation. My brother knew I collected and sold her stuff on Ebay so he thought I would be interested in seeing her grave. When he told me about it I thought it would be nice to see. I thought maybe I could take some pictures to put with my merchandise to seem more legit.
To prepare for that visit, Participant 6 did not make any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 6 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that it would be impressive,

I was expecting her grave to be much bigger. I mean I didn’t think she would be in a wall. I thought she would have a huge tombstone, or a statue of an angel or something like that. My wife and I were both surprised you could walk right up to her grave and touch it.

The actual experience of Participant 6 involved being fascinated by her grave,

I did not think you could walk right up to her grave and touch it. I did not think people would be leaving stuff at her grave still. I thought of her fans as the people who bought the stuff I put on Ebay. I did not think these same people would also be visiting her grave and leaving personal stuff behind for her.

Some of the activities performed during the visit included observing her grave and selling Marilyn Monroe merchandise. Participant 6 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because the experience was an adventure,

When I visit Marilyn Monroe’s grave it’s just an interesting and kind of odd experience. It’s interesting because she is someone who was very famous and I collect her items so I have learned about her to make better sales. It’s odd because of how the people react to someone they never even knew.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 6 shared that he thought about how to make more money from selling Marilyn Monroe memorabilia.
**Participant 7.** Participant 7’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw pictures of her. The nature of the connection that Participant 7 felt with Marilyn Monroe was deep personal connection, especially her need to be loved,

Marilyn’s life is a testament to the fact that none of us are really all that different. No matter how rich or how smart or how sexy any of us are, we all still just want to be loved and when we don’t get that love we fall into doubt and despair. I think that’s really interesting and something that I can relate to personally with Marilyn’s life story.

The motivation of Participant 7 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to bond with his girlfriend, who also loved Marilyn Monroe,

I was dating a girl from school who was also a big Marilyn Monroe fan. She didn’t really care about Marilyn’s movies, but she did really like Marilyn’s look and tragic story. We bonded a lot by talking about Marilyn’s past and the sadness that made up so much of Marilyn’s romantic life. My ex was really drawn to the tragic aspect of Marilyn’s love life and that left an impression on me.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 7 did some research on the Internet. The expectations of Participant 7 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that her grave would be impressive and that going there would be an adventure. The actual experience of Participant 7 involved being fascinated by her grave,

I remember that the small cemetery was really well lit by the warm sun. I remember not having too much trouble finding Marilyn’s grave and being surprised that she was actually buried in a wall and not in the ground at all. I
remember that feeling of excitement I got when I first spotted the grave and knew
I was going to surprise my girlfriend.

Participant 7 discussed Marilyn Monroe with friends when he visited her gravesite in Los Angeles,

I remember having a really in depth conversation about Marilyn right in front of
her grave. We talked about all of the 1000s of people who had stood right there
before us. We talked about how much love there still was for Marilyn and how
sad it was that Marilyn took her own life.

Participant 7 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it
gave him an opportunity to meet other fans and have a sense of peace and adventure,

I get a real feeling of peace and a chance to think about important things in life.

It’s a good way for me to clear my head and spend some quite time. LA is a really
big noisy city, so finding a place to relax and just think is a really special thing. I
always think of Marilyn’s grave as that place for me.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 7 shared that she thought about mortality and
finding love when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave.

Participant 8. Participant 8’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened though
watching her movies. The nature of the connection that Participant 8 felt with Marilyn Monroe
was a deep personal connection, especially about being wounded,

I think people relate to her as a wounded person. She was abandoned at a young
age and the scars of that childhood left a lasting shadow that hung over her for her
entire life. I think most people face problems and issues in their childhood that
can leave them feeling less than worthy of kindness and affection. That’s the part
of Marilyn’s life I think people relate to the most. The idea that past traumas can creep into your adult life and that even the most beautiful and talented among us are still human beings with histories and tragedies of our own to overcome.

The motivation of Participant 8 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to have a deeper connection with Marilyn as a fan. To prepare for that visit, Participant 8 did some research on the Internet. Participant 8 had no expectations before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave,

I didn’t even think about any of these things. I just wanted to get there and experience it. For me there wasn’t much anticipation about what was to come or how things might feel. I’ve always been a person who lives in the moment and flies by the seat of my pants.

The actual experience of Participant 8 involved being emotional,

It was pretty emotional. Luckily it was a beautiful spring/summer day during the middle of the week. No one else was around so I got to experience it all on my own. I was very thankful for that. It was a personal experience and something that meant a lot to me. I don’t think it would have been the same if the place was climbing with tourists.

Participant 8 reflected on Marilyn Monroe’s life when he visited her grave. Participant 8 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave him the opportunity to connect with her,

For me though, it’s definitely about experiencing a deeper connection that just observing her body of work. It’s about actually being there with her and knowing
that being in her presence is an amazing gift especially considering she’s been
gone now for over 50 years.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 8 shared that he did not engage in any
personal reflection, “When I visit, it isn’t really about me or my feelings. I don’t really think
about my own death much at all. I really just think about Marilyn’s life and her death, not really
my own”.

**Participant 9.** Participant 9’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened as a
result of her family. However, Participant 9 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn
Monroe. The motivation of Participant 9 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity,

Even though I have lived in LA for a large part of my life I did not think too much
about Marilyn Monroe’s grave or if I would ever visit it. I am a TV critic and
after attending a conference for TV critics in LA, a friend and I decided we were
over being around live stars and decided to visit some dead ones.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 9 did little preparations. The expectations of
Participant 9 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave involved seeing an impressive
grave and seeing lots of people, “I guess I also thought that her grave would be a big tribute to
her. Kind of like a small scale monument similar to those in Washington D.C. for Abraham
Lincoln or Thomas Jefferson”. The actual experience of Participant 9 involved being fascinated
about her grave,

My first feeling was surprise. Westwood Village is oddly located, it’s just off the
UCLA campus and you walk thru a skyscraper’s parking garage to get into the
back gates of the cemetery. Also, there was no line or security to get into the
park. The park is very small and the grounds were nicely kept. It was very easy
even without the help of our map to find Marilyn Monroe and the other famous residents in Westwood Village.

Some of the activities performed during the visit included observing her grave and discussing Marilyn Monroe’s life. Participant 9 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it is an adventure and can provide insights about celebrities, “I don’t really feel like I get anything out of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. It’s just one of those rare and random things that is free and unique to do in LA”. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 9 shared that she thought about her career and mortality when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

Participant 10. Participant 10’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he saw pictures of her when she was still young. The nature of the connection that Participant 10 felt with Marilyn Monroe was she was part of the American culture as an icon. The motivation of Participant 10 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was seeing the graves of famous celebrities, not just Marilyn Monroe.

My desire to go was based on seeing celebrities in general, not just Marilyn.

However, I can say there are a lot of celebrity cemeteries in LA but the reason I chose Westwood was because of Marilyn. If I was going to see a celebrity grave I figured why not start with the biggest dead star I could think of.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 10 performed an online research about the cemetery where Marilyn Monroe was buried. The expectations of Participant 10 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave involved impressive and romantic place for people to visit,

I really expected to be surrounding with an over the top setting where you could get close but not too close. I thought I would feel like I was in the presence of
Hollywood royalty and might have to fight off at least a few other fans to get my turn to walk up to the grave. I expected to feel overwhelmed and blown away by the magnitude of the space.

The actual experience of Participant 10 involved being surprised about the appearance and condition of Marilyn Monroe’s grave,

I was really surprised with what Marilyn’s grave looked like. It was very simple and it was actually in a wall. I was under the impression that it would be in a massive vault like the old time family graves or would at least be located inside a mausoleum. It is totally and completely open to the public.

Participant 10 just observed her grave when she finally visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, “I just stood there for the longest time taking in the scene, noting the stone bench nearby and paying attention to the little things like the color of her crypt stone and the exact year she died”. Participant 10 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave the opportunity to connect with Marilyn and contemplate on life,

I got a chance to reflect on my own life and connect to a deceased person that meant a lot to me. I got to reflect on things I hadn’t thought of for years and to walk away with an appreciation for the way I hope to be remembered. I thought about life, death, and what it all amounts to when you’re gone.

In terms of personal reflections, Participant 10 shared that mortality was one of the things he reflected on when he visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, “I didn’t feel like I was confronting a fear of death, but I did feel like I was dealing with feelings surrounding death”.

Participant 11. Participant 11’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw her in movies and became a fan of hers. The nature of the connection that
Participant 11 felt with Marilyn Monroe was of artistic nature, “I identify with Marilyn because I have an artist soul. I like cinema, dance, and music. I studied drawing for many years and I dance since I was a children”. The motivation of Participant 11 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that he has been a fan of hers for a long time,

I want to go to Marilyn’s grave for such a long time. I finally had the opportunity to go in 1999 when I was traveled on the West Coast of San Francisco to Los Angeles. I saw Marilyn’s house and crypt on this trip. It was like seeing her first house and her final house. It was very special to me and I take lot of pictures. I also saw her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. This trip was very short, but I made sure to come back to better see her again.

To prepare for that visit, Participant 11 did a lot of reading about Marilyn Monroe,

I did lot of reading before my first trip. I have read all the biographies of Marilyn and I have noted all addresses that were related to her in California. I made myself a card that listed all the places I should try to see on my first trip. I also go through my Marilyn collection to get me in the mood to see more about her. I also watched a bunch of her movies before I left to have a good picture of her in my mind.

The expectations of Participant 1 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that the place would be swamped with people, “I thought that it would be hard to get close because of a crowd. I also thought there would be security there too maybe to make sure no one disturbs the peace”. The actual experience of Participant 11 involved being fascinated with her gravesite and being emotional,
I wanted to say something to her, but I couldn’t. I feel like I stood there for hours, but I don’t know how long. I had so many feelings. I felt so close to Marilyn and I did not know what to do.

During the visit, Participant 11 took some pictures of the gravesite,

I felt the urge to kiss her stone too, but I was too nervous. I just pulled out my camera and took pictures. I took pictures of everything up close and far away. I meant to ask someone to take a picture of me standing next to her crypt, but no one ever showed up.

Participant 11 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it made him feel closer to Marilyn and he got to meet other fans of hers. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 11 shared that he does not reflect on his own life. Instead, he reflects on Marilyn Monroe’s life and death.

**Structural Descriptions**

The structural descriptions for each participant are provided in this section. Structural descriptions reflect the experiences of the participants from a less literal perspective and linking their responses to preexisting concepts. This step involved integrating the structural qualities and themes that were generated from a different vantage point in such a way that the textural descriptions were transformed into a more abstract perspective. For example, Participant 2 spoke about having “a real connection with Marilyn that would not have been possible if she were alive. I feel like I am able to get up close and personal with the real person and not the movie star”. This quote was transformed into a structural description by making her statement more abstract by highlighting that the perceived benefit of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave site is to
have an opportunity for connection. Similar to the textural descriptions, these descriptions are instrumental in developing the essence of the experience of each participant.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she attended a writing class and wrote a paper on Marilyn Monroe. The nature of the connection that Participant 1 felt with Marilyn Monroe was deep emotional connection. The motivation of Participant 1 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to bond with a friend and do something for free in Los Angeles. To prepare for that visit, Participant 1 brought some food and immersed herself with Marilyn Monroe’s life though her movies and books. The expectations of Participant 1 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that her grave is open to the public and well taken care of. The actual experience of Participant 1 regarding visiting her grave was that it felt like visiting a family member for her. Some of the activities performed during the visit included greeting Marilyn Monroe, having a picnic, and talking in her head. Participant 1 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gives her an opportunity to contemplate about life. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 1 shared that she thought about mortality when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she enrolled in film class and through her family. The nature of the connection that Participant 2 felt with Marilyn Monroe was that she is a role model for her and feels a spiritual and personal connection, especially about being misunderstood. The motivation of Participant 2 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that she is a fan of hers. To prepare for that visit, Participant 2 did very little preparation. The expectations of Participant 2 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave involved seeing an impressive gravesite. The actual experience of Participant 2 involved feeling connected with Marilyn Monroe and being emotional. Some of the activities
performed by Participant 2 during her visit included bringing gifts, cleaning her tomb, observing other people, and talking in her head about Marilyn Monroe. Participant 2 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave her an opportunity to connect with Marilyn Monroe. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 2 shared that when she visited Marilyn’s gravesite, she reflected about her own career and personal past experiences.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she first saw a picture of her. Participant 3 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 3 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that she was fond of visiting cemeteries. To prepare for that visit, Participant 3 didn’t make any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 3 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that it would be difficult to find. The actual experience of Participant 3 involved feeling uneasy because she was with her boyfriend who did not know that she had a fascination with cemeteries. When Participant 3 visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, she read the tombstones of several people buried in that cemetery. Participant 3 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave her an opportunity to contemplate about her life. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 3 shared that she thought about mortality when she visited her gravesite.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw her in movies. Participant 4 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 4 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity. To prepare for that visit, Participant 4 did not do any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 4 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that she would be buried in a private estate. The actual experience of Participant 4 was described as nothing special.
Participant 4 did not stay very long, but he took some pictures when he visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Participant 4 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it was something interesting to do. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 4 shared that he reflected about mortality and his personal past experiences.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when she first saw a picture of her and through film class. Participant 5 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 5 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity. To prepare for that visit, Participant 5 did not make any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 5 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that it would be impressive and closed to the public. The actual experience of Participant 5 involved being fascinated and feeling connected with Marilyn. One of the main activities performed during the visit included diligently observing Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 5 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave her a better understanding of the power of celebrity to other people. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 5 did not engage in any personal reflections when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw pictures of her. The nature of the connection that Participant 6 felt with Marilyn Monroe was a business opportunity to sell merchandise. The motivation of Participant 6 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to legitimize his business and to satisfy his own curiosity. To prepare for that visit, Participant 6 did not make any significant preparations. The expectations of Participant 6 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that it would be impressive. The actual experience of Participant 6 involved being fascinated by her grave.
Some of the activities performed during the visit included observing her grave and selling Marilyn Monroe merchandise. Participant 6 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it was an adventure. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 6 shared that he thought about how to make more money from selling Marilyn Monroe memorabilia.

**Participant 7.** Participant 7’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw pictures of her. The nature of the connection that Participant 7 felt with Marilyn Monroe was deep personal connection, particularly about her need to be loved. The motivation of Participant 7 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to bond with his girlfriend, who also loved Marilyn Monroe. To prepare for that visit, Participant 7 did research on the Internet. The expectations of Participant 7 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that her grave would be impressive and that going there would be an adventure. The actual experience of Participant 7 involved being fascinated by her grave. Participant 7 discussed Marilyn Monroe with friends when he visited her gravesite in Los Angeles. Participant 7 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave him the opportunity to meet other fans, have a sense of peace, and adventure. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 7 shared that he thought about mortality and finding love when he visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave.

**Participant 8.** Participant 8’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened through watching her movies. The nature of the connection that Participant 8 felt with Marilyn Monroe was a deep personal connection, especially about being wounded. The motivation of Participant 8 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to have a deeper connection with Marilyn as a fan. To prepare for that visit, Participant 8 did some research on the Internet. Participant 8 had no expectations before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. The actual experience of Participant 8 involved being emotional. Participant 8 reflected on Marilyn Monroe’s life when he visited her
grave. Participant 8 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave him the opportunity to connect with her. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 8 did not engage in any personal reflections.

**Participant 9.** Participant 9’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened as a result of her family. However, Participant 9 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 9 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity. To prepare for that visit, Participant 9 did little preparations. The expectations of Participant 9 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave involved seeing an impressive grave and seeing lots of people. The actual experience of Participant 9 involved being fascinated about her grave. Some of the activities performed during the visit included observing her grave and discussing Marilyn Monroe’s life. Participant 9 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it is an adventure and can provide insights about celebrities. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 9 shared that she thought about her career and mortality when she visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

**Participant 10.** Participant 10’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he saw a picture of hers when she was still young. The nature of the connection that Participant 10 felt with Marilyn Monroe was she was part of the American culture as an icon. The motivation of Participant 10 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was seeing the graves of famous celebrities, not just Marilyn Monroe. To prepare for that visit, Participant 10 did an online research of the cemetery. The expectations of Participant 10 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave involved impressive and romantic place for people to visit. The actual experience of Participant 10 involved being surprised about the appearance and condition of Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Participant 10 just observed her grave when she finally visited Marilyn
Monroe’s gravesite. Participant 10 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave the opportunity to connect with Marilyn and contemplate on life. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 10 shared that mortality was one of the things he reflected on when he visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

**Participant 11.** Participant 11’s first significant impression of Marilyn Monroe happened when he first saw her in movies and became a fan of hers. The nature of the connection that Participant 11 felt with Marilyn Monroe was of artistic nature. The motivation of Participant 11 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that he has been a fan of hers for a long time. To prepare for that visit, Participant 11 did a lot of reading about Marilyn Monroe. The expectations of Participant 1 with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was that the place would be swamped with people. The actual experience of Participant 11 involved being fascinated with the grave and being emotional. During the visit, Participant 11 took some pictures of the gravesite. Participant 11 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it made him feel closer to Marilyn and he got to meet other fans of hers. In terms of personal reflections, Participant 11 shared that he does not reflect on his own life. Instead, he reflects on Marilyn Monroe’s life and death.

**Textural-Structural Descriptions**

The textural-structural descriptions for each participant are provided in this section. The essence of the experience of each participant will be provided based on the combination of textural and structural descriptions that were created.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 felt emotionally connected with Marilyn Monroe. Her motivation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave is primarily rooted as a way to bond with her best friend
who loved Marilyn Monroe. However, when she finally visited her gravesite, she had the opportunity to contemplate about her life, which she found enriching,

When I visit Marilyn I am visiting my family. I am able to discuss my inner thoughts and desires with Marilyn and express my true feelings about her and my own life. I am not able to do this anywhere else.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 felt connected with Marilyn Monroe because she regard her as a role model and feels a spiritual connection with her, especially about being misunderstood by other people. She visited Marilyn Monroe’s grave because she is a huge of hers,

I wanted to go to Marilyn Monroe’s grave when I was thirteen years old and first became a fan. However, at the time I thought of course this would be impossible. I envisioned Marilyn Monroe’s grave would be on a private estate. Open only to family and close friends of the family. I never in my wildest dreams thought that it was open to the public. Visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite gave her an opportunity to be connected and feel close with Marilyn Monroe.

**Participant 3.** Participant did not have any deep personal connection with Marilyn Monroe.

The motivation of Participant 3 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that she was fond of visiting cemeteries,

I know that this may seem morbid, but I really enjoy visiting cemeteries. It’s not really about seeing celebrities but it’s about reading the tombstones. I find it interesting to see the words of remembrance people have decided to carve into the stone of their loved ones.

Upon visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, she contemplates about life by reading not just Marilyn’s tombstone but other people who were buried in cemeteries as well.
Participant 4. Participant 4 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 4 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity, “I heard through a friend at school that she was buried in a cemetery open to the public. I thought she might be wrong, but I still got the details and decided I would check it out”. Participant 4 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it was something interesting to do.

Participant 5. Participant 5 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 5 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity. The main benefit that Participant received from visiting her gravesite was a greater understanding of how Marilyn Monroe remains powerful to many people, especially her fans. However, she found that kind of devotion from other people unhealthy and disturbing.

Participant 6. The only connection that Participant 6 felt with Marilyn Monroe was entrepreneurial in nature, which he perceived that visiting her grave would legitimize his business in selling Marilyn Monroe memorabilia,

The first time I went to Marilyn Monroe’s grave was when my wife and I went out to California for my niece’s graduation. My brother knew I collected and sold her stuff on Ebay so he thought I would be interested in seeing her grave. When he told me about it I thought it would be nice to see. I thought maybe I could take some pictures to put with my merchandise to seem more legit.

Participant 7. The nature of the connection that Participant 7 felt with Marilyn Monroe was deep personal connection, especially her need to be loved,

Marilyn’s life is a testament to the fact that none of us are really all that different. No matter how rich or how smart or how sexy any of us are, we all still just want to be loved
and when we don’t get that love we fall into doubt and despair. I think that’s really interesting and something that I can relate to personally with Marilyn’s life story.

Participant 7 visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to bond with his girlfriend, who also loved Marilyn Monroe. Not only was he able to bond with his girlfriend, visiting Marilyn’s grave also gave him an opportunity to meet other fans and have a sense of peace and adventure.

**Participant 8.** Participant 8 felt a deep personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 8 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was to have a deeper connection with Marilyn as a fan,

I think people relate to her as a wounded person. She was abandoned at a young age and the scars of that childhood left a lasting shadow that hung over her for her entire life. I think most people face problems and issues in their childhood that can leave them feeling less than worthy of kindness and affection. That’s the part of Marilyn’s life I think people relate to the most.

**Participant 9.** Participant 9 did not feel any personal connection with Marilyn Monroe. The motivation of Participant 9 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was curiosity,

Even though I have lived in LA for a large part of my life I did not think too much about Marilyn Monroe’s grave or if I would ever visit it. I am a TV critic and after attending a conference for TV critics in LA, a friend and I decided we were over being around live stars and decided to visit some dead ones.

Visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite did not yield meaningful benefits because it is only perceived as an adventure, “I don’t really feel like I get anything out of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. It’s just one of those rare and random things that is free and unique to do in LA”.

110
Participant 10. Participant 10 felt that Marilyn Monroe was part of the American culture as an icon. Participant 10’s motivation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was seeing the graves of famous celebrities, not just Marilyn Monroe,

   My desire to go was based on seeing celebrities in general, not just Marilyn. However, I can say there are a lot of celebrity cemeteries in LA but the reason I chose Westwood was because of Marilyn. If I was going to see a celebrity grave I figured why not start with the biggest dead star I could think of.

Participant 10 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it gave the opportunity to connect with Marilyn and contemplate on life.

Participant 11. Participant 11 felt connected with Marilyn Monroe artistically.

The motivation of Participant 11 in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was that he has been a fan of hers for a long time,

   I want to go to Marilyn’s grave for such a long time. I finally had the opportunity to go in 1999 when I was traveled on the West Coast of San Francisco to Los Angeles. I saw Marilyn’s house and crypt on this trip. It was like seeing her first house and her final house. It was very special to me and I take lot of pictures. I also saw her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. This trip was very short, but I made sure to come back to better see her again.

Participant 11 perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was a benefit because it made him feel closer to Marilyn and he got to meet other Marilyn Monroe fans.

Composite Descriptions

This section provides the composite descriptions regarding the “meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, p. 121). These composite
descriptions were based on the individual textural and structural descriptions that were
generated. The composite descriptions summarize the experience of the sample as a single
group, focusing on the themes that emerged from the data.

Marilyn Monroe made a significant impression on most of the participants upon seeing
her pictures when they were young. Many of the participants were instantly struck by her beauty
when they first saw a picture of her, which ranged from magazines, posters, and in television and
movie screens. Generally, there was a perception that Marilyn Monroe remains in the
unconscious of many people despite having no regular exposure to her in terms of activities or
thoughts.

Given Marilyn Monroe’s continued wide presence, participants either felt a deep
emotional connection with her, but others did not feel any personal connection with her. To
those who felt connected to her, the emotional connection was rooted on her vulnerability,
insecurity, wounds, traumas, and quest for love as a human being and not as an actress. The
participants in the study responded to her personal life more than her professional life. However,
other participants did not feel any personal connection with her, viewing her more as an iconic
movie star.

Tourist curiosity was the motivation for most participants in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s
grave. There was a perception that her gravesite is free and open to the public, which made
visiting her gravesite attractive to the participants. Most of the participants did not have any
elaborate preparation to visit her gravesite, but others engaged in internet research to prepare.
The nature of the research that the participants conducted primarily involved looking for the
address of the cemetery.
The expectation of the participants before visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave was to see an impressive grave of Marilyn Monroe, reflecting her stature as an American icon. Because of Marilyn Monroe’s reputation as a glamorous actress and icon, many of the participants were expecting that her gravesite would match that same glamour. Upon the actual visit, the participants in the study experienced fascination and surprise upon seeing Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Many of the participants were surprised and fascinated with her tombstone, including the other people who visited her. Some of the things that fascinated the participants were that they could touch her grave and be really physically close to her and that security was non-existent.

The participants in the study reported doing different activities in Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite that included observing her grave, taking pictures, greeting Marilyn Monroe, talking in their heads, and discussing Marilyn Monroe’s life. Participants perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave made them feel connected to her, whether as an icon and as a person. The participants in the study experienced reflecting about mortality when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.
Chapter 5 Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers, regarding their motivations in visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA. This chapter will focus on the discussion of the results, which was presented in the previous chapter. This discussion chapter will be organized to these following sections: (a) relating the results to the literature, (b) theoretical implications, and (c) implications for practice, and (d) recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with the study’s conclusions.

Relating the Results to the Literature

In this section, the results of the study will be related to the literature, which will be organized based on the four research questions of the study. The goal of this section is to provide deeper insights into how the results of the study are consistent or inconsistent with the literature in order to have a better understanding of people’s experiences, motivations, and expectations for visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe. The findings that contributed to the expansion of the literature on dark tourism will also be discussed in order to show how this study produced results that are not yet known.

RQ1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers that have led them to seek out Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA? The findings indicated that most participants remembered that Marilyn Monroe made a significant impression on them upon seeing her pictures when they were young. Because Marilyn Monroe was a ubiquitous and iconic celebrity, many participants felt a deep emotional connection with her, which could
explain why they wanted to visit her gravesite. This is somewhat consistent with Huggins’ (2012) findings that the gravesites of deceased sports celebrities can be a venue that can engage fans.

Despite the connection that some fans felt with Marilyn explaining why they sought visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave, people who aren’t necessarily fans also seek out dark tourism because the experience can be fascinating. Most of the participants found Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite fascinating even though their actual experiences did not match their expectations. Overall, new information gained from this study is that it appears that tourists will seek out dark tourism if it involves a famous iconic celebrity such as Marilyn Monroe regardless whether they feel personal connection or avid fans. Because Marilyn Monroe is part of the American pop culture, many people find visiting her gravesite as something worth doing regardless of their feelings towards her. As Foley and Lennon (1996) argued, the media has played a role in the continued interest of the public to popular personalities such as JFK and Marilyn Monroe. For many people as exemplified by the findings of the study, the desire to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite is often influenced by their expectations of the icon the way the media have portrayed her.

RQ2. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers that have led them to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA? The findings indicate that many participants’ motivation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was primarily influenced by their curiosity as tourists. According to Levitt (2010), Hollywood stars from the past were secluded from the public view by their studios, which intensified public fascination, which is different from the constant media coverage of celebrities today. Using the lens of dark tourism
among Hollywood stars from the past such as Marilyn Monroe, people still find her to be a fascinating figure because there has not been a lot of information available about her even though a lot already has been written about her life and career. Marilyn Monroe has not received the same type of tabloid celebrity coverage that many celebrities today receive, making her more fascinating and enigmatic to the general public.

There were also participants who wanted to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite because they were fans of her and felt some personal connection with her struggles. It appears that for many tourists, visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was primarily viewed as a tourist destination, but there were people who planned their visits and were motivated by the connection that they felt with Marilyn Monroe. These motivation reasons are consistent with the range of motivations documented by past researchers who found that the motivations of people for visiting cemeteries and other dark tourism sites range from self-understanding, curiosity, conscience, a “must see this place” feeling, and exclusiveness (Huggins, 2012; Isaac & Çakmak, 2013). For people who felt a deeper and more personal connection with Marilyn Monroe, visiting her gravesite can be viewed as a form of pilgrimage wherein people regard her gravesite as a sacred place. This is also consistent with other gravesites of famous celebrities who were able to develop a connection with the public (Margry, 2008).

Stone and Sharpley (2008) claimed that one of the reasons for the popularity of dark tourism is the increasing primal need for people to maintain a sense of order and safety despite the threats for existence. As Stone and Sharpley (2008) argued, people do not usually reflect about death and do not necessarily seek out experiences that encourage thoughts about death, but people who engage in dark tourism are motivated by these experiences. The findings of this study did reveal that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite may elicit reflections about death, but
it appears that such reflections were not a conscious decision or effort. Reflections about life and death appear to be spontaneous experiences elicited by visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, but it was not the primary motivation that explained why different individuals chose to visit her gravesite.

**RQ3. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding their expectations in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?** The findings indicate that the expectations in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was primarily concerned with how impressive her gravesite would be, reflecting her stature as an American icon. This perception might have been influenced by how the media have portrayed her life and death and the glamorous roles that Marilyn Monroe has played in her career. However, the actual experience of the participants reflected fascination and surprise about the modesty of Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Some participants also reported feeling connected and feeling emotional when they finally visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

These expectation experiences do not necessarily coincide with the natural expectations of people when they visit cemeteries and gravesites (Levitt, 2012). These expectations of people who consume dark tourism are diverse and may depend on personal factors (Minić, 2012). In this study, expectations of tourists seem to be influenced by their perception of Marilyn Monroe, expecting that her gravesite would also be beautiful and elegant. In this study, the new information gained is that expectations of tourists may be dependent on the actual person involved or central to a dark tourism attraction. The expectations of the participants in the study with regard to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite appears to be not influenced by a general
perception about cemeteries, but were heavily influenced by their specific impressions of Marilyn Monroe.

RQ4. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding the benefits they feel that they receive from visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA? The gravesites of famous celebrities often attract many tourists (Alderman, 2002; Blom, 2000), but the benefits that they receive from such activities can be different for different groups of people, underscoring why the experiences of tourists who visit celebrity gravesites may not be generalized. The personality of each celebrity may also play a role in terms of how people view the experience. Many participants in this study perceived that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave made them feel connected to her. This is consistent with Cheal and Griffin’s (2013) study who found that individuals who visited Gallipoli felt personally connected to it. It appears that for fans of Marilyn Monroe, visiting her gravesite can be an opportunity to experience deeper connection with her.

This experience was also consistent with Levitt’s (2012) study, who discussed how visiting the cemeteries of famous celebrities are often made into tourist attractions. In addition to celebrating the lives of the deceased celebrities, these cemeteries are encouraged to be used as a social space where people can interact and connect with each other. However, the results of this study suggest that these practices are more likely to be positively perceived by her fans and people who felt deep personal connections with her. People who did not feel that personal connection with Marilyn Monroe and visited her gravesite as a tourist attraction found some of these practices negatively. Contrary to Levitt’s (2012) study, the negative perception of some of the visitors in this study was not because they felt Marilyn Monroe was being disrespected, but
that the devotion that some people showed can be considered somewhat disturbing and unhealthy.

Even though it was not their intention, many participants also experienced reflecting about mortality when they visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. The personal reflections about mortality that the participants experienced were consistent with Stone and Sharpley’s (2008) argument that dark tourism consumers are bringing death back into their consciousness and readying themselves for their own mortality. However, it appears that personal reflection about mortality is not a conscious decision of the people who chose to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite. Instead, thoughts about mortality only occurred to them when they had the chance to reflect upon visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

Even though it was a discrepant experience from the sample, the commoditization of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite is also a possible benefit for some people. This is consistent with Lennon and Foley’s (1996) study who asserted that dark tourism can be commoditized. In this study, commoditization involved selling memorabilia in her gravesite, taking the opportunity to gain more profits from Marilyn Monroe fans who are willing to spend significant amounts of money. Blurring the line of appropriateness and respect, some viewed buying memorabilia items as an opportunity to buy hard to find items, whereas others found the activity somewhat disrespectful and tacky.

**Theoretical Implications**

A simple model of understanding why people choose to visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite is based on Pearce’s (1988, 1991) leisure ladder model, wherein tourism is viewed as a fulfillment of the needs of people outside their basic physiological needs. Pearce’s leisure ladder model includes the following leisure needs that are hierarchical in nature: relaxation and bodily
needs, stimulation, relationship, self-esteem and development, and fulfillment (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2002, p. 38). In relation to visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave, it appears that there is no clear-cut leisure need that can epitomize people’s motivations. However, the findings of the study generally indicate that the motivation of people can range from relaxation, stimulation, and relationship, representing the current leisure needs of people who choose to visit Marilyn Monroe’s grave. Specifically, people visit Marilyn Monroe’s grave can range from simple adventure to a deeper need for emotional connection and relationship with Marilyn Monroe as the icon, artist, and person.

Personal factors can determine why individuals want to engage in dark tourism (Farmaki, 2013). There are multiple ways to understand why people seek out dark tourism, and Dann’s (1998) model appears to be the more comprehensive model that can provide insights about the topic. However, the findings of the study cannot be subsumed to Dann’s (1998) model for why people engage in dark tourism such as visiting gravesites, which included desire to interact with ghosts, desire for novelty, desire for nostalgia, desire to celebrate crime, and desire to experience an awareness of death. The results of this study suggest that people may also seek dark tourism when it involves a celebrity that people idolize, admire, or important in the culture such as Marilyn Monroe.

This finding appears to be more closely related to Biran’s (2011) findings, noting that dark tourism experiences may be understood as a heritage experience and not purely a dark tourism experience. Marilyn Monroe has been part of the American culture, whether consciously or subconsciously, and visiting her gravesite can be viewed as a heritage experience. Moreover, the findings of the study also suggest that Marilyn Monroe remains to have a strong fanbase who seem to feel connected with each other, further highlighting the heritage experience.
of visiting her gravesite. Visiting the gravesite of a famous celebrity that people feel connected with can be a reason for seeking out dark tourism. Seeking out dark experiences does not necessarily involve wanting to experience the macabre, but as Biran (2011) and this study showed can also be motivated by less dark motivations. Consistent with both Stone (2006) and Raine (2013) assertion, the findings of this study align with the assertion that visiting celebrity graves can be regarded as a “lighter” form of dark tourism, underscoring the less macabre and dark nature of the motivations and experiences of people who visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite.

There are some similarities between this study and Podoshen’s (2013) findings about dark tourism, which is that dark tourism can be motivated by processes that relate to simulation and emotional contagion. Moreover, Podoshen’s arguments about emotional contagion focuses on people wanting for the convergence of emotional states (Podoshen, 2013), is also consistent with the findings of this study that some people sought visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite because they wanted to feel more emotionally connected to her. However, the findings of this study and Podoshen’s (2013) study diverged in that Podeshen argued that the emotional motivation is associated more with emotional feelings about death. In this study, it appears that people visited Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite to celebrate her life, including her foibles and vulnerabilities. Even though some people focused on how she died, including the different conspiracies surrounding her death, the primary motivation is less associated with negative feelings.

Because there are other deceased celebrities who have reached the same iconic stature as Marilyn Monroe in the pop culture such as Jim Morrison and Elvis Presley, it seems plausible and apparent that people will visit their gravesites because they are important to the culture.
Contrary to the conceptualizations of special interest tourism, wherein the hypothesis is that only people who are fans of Marilyn Monroe will be able to appreciate visiting her gravesite (Kruja & Gyrezi, 2011), the findings suggest that a larger group of people can appreciate visiting her gravesite. The connection that people feel with iconic celebrities can range from deeply personal, spiritual, artistic, or simply as fans. Regardless of their motivation, it appears that people feel fascinated with visiting the gravesite of a famous iconic celebrity. Some people will view visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe as an emotional experience, but others will experience it more as an adventure.

**Implications for Business**

The results of the study suggest that people will seek out dark tourism when it involves an iconic celebrity who is part of larger American pop culture, which was how people perceived Marilyn Monroe. Regardless of whether people are fans or feel personally connected with Marilyn Monroe, visiting her gravesite can be a fascinating experience for tourists. This finding provides some empirical support that visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite appeals to a diverse group of people regardless of the degree of actual relationship or emotional connection visitors had to Marilyn Monroe in life.

Another implication of the results of this study is that even though people will generally find the experience of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite fascinating as a heritage experience, it is possible for the experience to take on greater meaning for participants who have knowledge of Marilyn Monroe as a person. Specifically, participants with greater knowledge of Marilyn Monroe as a person were more likely to experience emotional contagion, or the genuine expression and feeling of emotions similar to those the tourist believes Marilyn Monroe must have felt during her life. This state of emotional contagion leads to greater connection between
tourist and the attraction, making the overall experience more memorable and important to the
dark tourist.

This suggests that dark tourism providers would do well to provide context and
background of a personal nature regarding the subjects of their attractions. This insight helps
explain why Elvis Presley’s grave at Graceland is such popular and lucrative attraction. Elvis
Presley’s grave is located at the icon’s home in a peaceful garden often visited by Elvis Presley
himself while still alive. Before visiting the grave, tourists walk through Elvis Presley’s home
seeing all of the everyday objects and effects that were so personal to him. Tourists listen to an
audio tour while in the home and leading up to the grave, hearing many personal stories and
insights about Elvis Presley as a private person and resident of Graceland. The findings of this
study suggest that dark tourism providers who offer this kind of personal background and context
will spark emotional contagion in visitors leading to a more meaningful and significant tourist
experience. As tourism in the new millennium becomes increasingly reliant on online reviews
and the enthusiastic reflections and recollections of prior visitors, it only makes sense that setting
the stage to insight emotional contagion will benefit an attraction by eliciting more meaningful,
frequent, and passionate reviews and word of mouth.

Another implication of the results of this study is that the expectations of visitors to
celebrity graves have more to do with the celebrity themselves then they have to do with
cemeteries in general. This suggests that dark tourism providers who wish to better cater to the
expectations of their customers should consider the perceptions their customers have of a given
celebrity before crafting a tourist experience. For example, a dark tourist experience centered
around Marilyn Monroe would likely be more satisfying to customers if it were constructed to be
glamorous and romantic as opposed to being haunted or macabre in the way one might view cemeteries generally.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results discussed, several recommendations are proposed. Future researchers might consider conducting a comparative study that compares the perceptions of people who are fans and people who are not fans of Marilyn Monroe or another famous celebrity to understand what visiting their resting places mean to both groups of people. This study showed that there are some differences in experiences and perceptions of both groups in terms of turning cemeteries into tourist destinations. This research suggestion would be beneficial in providing a deeper understanding of the type of tourists who find dark tourism, specifically those involving visiting the gravesites of famous celebrities, more personally enjoyable and worth visiting.

Another recommendation is to conduct a study to measure the effects offering greater personal background and context might have on the experience of dark tourists visiting Marilyn Monroe’s grave. One control group would visit the grave as any other tourists might while the experiment group would be given significant personal context about Marilyn Monroe before their visit. At the end of the visit, participants would complete interviews or surveys based upon the findings and codes derived from this study. The purpose of these new interviews or surveys would be to see how well emotional contagion is elicited in the experiment group through various means of offering personal background and context about Marilyn Monroe before and during the tourists’ visit.

Another recommendation for future researchers is to conduct a quantitative study to validate the findings from this study. Using the results of the study in a quantitatively designed
study using a larger sample size will test whether the results can be generalized to a larger sample size outside this study. For example, the results of the study indicate that the perceived benefits of visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite included feeling connected, life contemplation, adventure, meeting other fans, understanding celebrity, and peace. These codes can be used as the choices in survey instruments asking participants about the benefits people get when they visit dark tourism sites.

Another recommendation for future research is to focus on the experience many visitors to Marilyn Monroe’s grave had of contemplating life, death, and their own mortality during their visits. One idea is to conduct in depth interviews with visitors focused on this specific aspect of celebrity grave tourism to discover if there are any parallels to the role organized religion plays in addressing these concerns for individuals in society. In an increasingly secular America, this could be an interesting way to intertwine the literature on dark tourism with that on sociology and religion in America.

Finally, the results of the study primarily indicate that the motivation for visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite was tourist curiosity. Another recommendation for future researchers is to examine the effect of the nature of the death of a famous celebrity and the motivation of people for visiting their gravesites. It might be beneficial to differentiate between people’s perceptions of various iconic celebrities who died from a range of events such as suicide, murder, drug overdose, or illness in order to see if there are differences in motivations or level of interest in visiting their gravesites.

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the dark tourism consumers regarding their motivations in
visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA. The findings indicated that people will find the gravesite of a famous and iconic celebrity such as Marilyn Monroe worthwhile and fascinating regardless of their degree of knowledge of the celebrity. Because of their stature in society and how these iconic celebrities have become part of the collective consciousness, seeing their gravesites can be a fascinating experience. However, it appears that the experience is more meaningful for people who have more knowledge of Marilyn Monroe as a person and hence relate to and empathize more deeply with her as a result of emotional contagion. Even though many people will find the experience meaningful, the experience is likely to be more emotional for fans and those with more personal context of the celebrity before visiting that celebrity’s grave.

The expectation of people when they visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite is that her grave would match her glamorous persona. Many people were surprised by the modesty of her grave, which was a fascinating discovery for them. The typical actual experience of people generally involves observing her grave and taking pictures. However, similar to the previous assertion, those with more personal context will find the experience more emotional and will likely engage in reflective activities. People can benefit from visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite in Los Angeles if they wanted to feel close and connected to the icon. The experience can also inadvertently lead to contemplation about one’s own life and mortality.

Visiting the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe does not necessarily focus on the macabre and the dark undertones of her life and death. Many people who visited her gravesite focused on celebrating her life. Based on the experiences of the participants in visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, it appears that dark tourism in this context is more than just a fringe tourist activity. Celebrity grave tourism is a form of dark tourism that can be accessible to a wide range of
people, particularly if it involves an iconic celebrity that people recognize as part of society’s
greater popular culture. This can be the case even for an icon deceased for over 50 years. So long
as that icon is relevant to current popular culture, their grave can become a tourist destination of
interest to a wide and diverse range of people.
Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Dear (insert name here):

As a recent visitor of Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite, you have been selected as one of the potential participants for a research study on the motivations behind visiting celebrity gravesites. This research will be done in order to better understand the motivations of tourists, such as yourself, that drive them to visit celebrity gravesites. If you choose to participate, an informed consent form will be sent to you through e-mail. After which, an e-mail interview will take place between (insert date here) and (insert date here), the duration of which will depend on your pace. Additionally, follow-up questions may be asked if I feel that I have failed to grasp your meaning.

Overall, this may require around one or two hours of your time, the proceeds of which can help advance research on tourism, specifically tourism in places such as celebrity gravesites. If you do choose to participate, please send an e-mail back to proceed with the informed consent form.

Sincerely,

Surjeet Baidwan
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: Dark Tourism: A Qualitative Empirical Study

INVESTIGATOR(S): Bo Bernhard and Surjeet Baidwan

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to explore and describe celebrity grave visitation as a form of tourism.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are (a) over 21 years of age, and (b) you have visited the gravesite of Marilyn Monroe.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Answer interview questions related to visiting celebrity graves. These questions will ask about basic demographic information in addition to questions related to the following topics:

1) What are your experiences and perceptions regarding your desire to seek out and visit Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

2) What do you expect to find or see, both about yourself and about the world, in your visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?
3) What are some of the benefits you feel that you get from visiting Marilyn Monroe’s gravesite at the Westwood Village Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles, CA?

**Benefits of Participation**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn more about celebrity grave visitation and how it relates to other types of tourism, and this kind of research could benefit other tourists in the future.

**Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study will include only minimal risks. There is a slight risk that you may become uncomfortable answering the questions presented. You are advised that you may stop the interview at any time or for any reason. If you are uncomfortable with any question asked you do not have to provide an answer.

**Cost /Compensation**

There is no financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately one hour of your time, although this may be shorter or longer, depending on the pace with which you answer the e-mail interview questions. You will not be monetarily compensated for your time.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Mr. Surjeet Baidwan at [redacted]. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All computer records will be stored in a password-protected flash drive, and all printed materials will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be deleted or shredded.

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant               Date

Participant Name (Please Print)
Appendix C: Initial Interview Protocol

**Your Relationship with Marilyn**

1) What does MM mean to you? How has she been a part of your life and why is she so important to you?

2) How did you first learn about MM? Please share any details you remember about your earliest experiences with her.

3) Please share one of your favorite experiences you’ve had as a fan of MM. Why is this story so special to you?

4) What are your feelings about MMs life and death? Do you connect with MMs life personally?

**Your First Visit:**

5) Think back to before you made your first visit to MMs grave. What made you want to go? Was there anything in particular that drew you to her grave?

6) How did you get ready for your first trip? Please describe in detail the process you went through to research and get ready for your trip.

7) Before your first visit - What did you think it would be like at MMs grave? What did you think you would see? How did you think you would feel?

8) What was it actually like on your first visit? Please describe the setting, people, and the feelings you had in great detail.

9) Please describe all the things you did while you were at the grave. How long did you spend doing these things?

10) Were there any interesting reflections, insights, or thoughts that came to you during your visit? If so, please share.
11) Have you returned to MMs grave since your first visit? If so, please describe how these later trips have been different or the same.

**Reflections on Your Visits:**

12) How do you think MM would feel about having so many visitors to her grave? Do you think she would be surprised at the amount of attention she gets?

13) What do you get out of visiting MMs grave? Do you think other fans take away similar or different feelings and experiences?

14) Do you think there are a lot of fans who visit MMs grave mainly because they think it’s a unique thing to do? Is this part of the reason why you like to visit?

15) Have you ever made friends with others who visit MMs grave? If so, how did your friendships begin and how have they grown over time?

16) Have you ever traded or sold memorabilia with another person you’ve met through your visits to the grave? If so, please describe any business dealings you’ve had.

17) Have you ever felt like you were confronting a fear of death at MMs grave? If so, please describe those feelings.

18) Have you ever thought about dying or your own mortality while visiting MMs grave? If so, please describe those feelings.

19) Have you ever reflected on your past while visiting MMs grave? If so, please describe the reflections you’ve had.

20) Is there anything else you want to share about your visits to MMs grave that we haven’t already addressed? If so, please share.

**Demographic Info**

21) Name:
22) Age:
23) Gender:
24) Occupation:
25) City where you live:
26) How many times have you been to MM's grave:
27) How often do you visit MM's grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.):
28) What's the farthest you've traveled to visit MM's grave:
29) Approximate date of your first visit to MM's grave:
30) Approximate date of your most recent trip to MM's grave:

Note: Other questions may be asked in the future as responses to the e-mail questionnaire may dictate that certain areas in the phenomenon have not been fully explored.
Appendix D: Participant Demographic Info

Participant 1 - Demographic Info
At the time of the interview, Participant 1 was a 54 years old female living in Las Vegas, NV. She was unemployed. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MM’s grave? This is hard to say. I have been visiting Marilyn for 35 years, so easily 100+ times.

How often do you visit MM’s grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): In the last couple years it was weekly, but since I have moved to Nevada, it’s been down to every month or so. Before that it was whenever I had a chance.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MM’s grave: Vegas to LA.

Approximate date of your first visit to MM’s grave: March 1979.
Approximate date of your most recent trip to MM’s grave: Marilyn’s 50th anniversary, August 5, 2012.

Participant 2 - Demographic Info
At the time of the interview, Participant 2 was a 48 year old female living in Los Angeles, CA. She worked as an administrative assistant. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MM’s grave: Not exactly sure but a lot.

How often do you visit MM’s grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): In the past year or two I’ve visited weekly, about every few days.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MM’s grave: Montreal, Canada to Los Angeles, California.

Approximate date of your first visit to MM’s grave: 1995.
Approximate date of your most recent trip to MM’s grave: 2015.

Participant 3 - Demographic Info
At the time of the interview, Participant 3 was a 45 year old female living in Littleton, CO. She worked as a publicist. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:
How many times have you been to MMs grave: 2.

How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): Only twice.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave: Colorado to California.

Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave: 1999.

Approximate date of your most recent trip to MMs grave: 2013.

Participant 4 - Demographic Info

At the time of the interview, Participant 4 was a 72 year old male living in Burbank, CA. He was a retired teacher. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MMs grave: 5 or 6.

How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.):
Every few years for the last several years.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave: 20 to 25 miles.

Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave: 1968.

Approximate date of your most recent trip to MMs grave: 2012.

Participant 5 - Demographic Info

At the time of the interview, Participant 5 was a 33 year old female living in Denver, CO. She worked as a federal worker. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MMs grave: 6.

How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): Not on a set schedule but I would say the closest is every three to four years.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave: Colorado to California.

Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave: 2002.
Approximate date of your most recent trip to MM's grave: 2012.

Participant 6 - Demographic Info

At the time of the interview, Participant 6 was a 45 year old male living in New Mexico. His profession was unspecified. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MM’s grave: 4.

How often do you visit MM’s grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): Every few years.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MM’s grave: New Mexico to California.

Approximate date of your first visit to MM’s grave: 1999.

Approximate date of your most recent trip to MM’s grave: August 2012.

Participant 7 - Demographic Info

At the time of the interview, Participant 7 was a 35 year old male living in Burbank, CA. He worked as a film editor. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MM’s grave: Over a dozen.

How often do you visit MM’s grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): Once or twice a year.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MM’s grave: 1 hour.

Approximate date of your first visit to MM’s grave: March 2000.

Approximate date of your most recent trip to MM’s grave: June 2014.

Participant 8 - Demographic Info

At the time of the interview, Participant 8 was a 48 year old male living in the San Francisco Bay area of California. He was unemployed. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MM’s grave: I’ve lost count. Well over 30.
How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): Several times a year, probably four or five.

What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave: Bay Area.

Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave: 2001.

Approximate date of your most recent trip to MMs grave: August, 2014.

Participant 9 - Demographic Info
At the time of the interview, Participant 9 was a 37 year old male living in Hollywood, CA. He was a TV critic. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MMs grave: 2.
How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): Every three or four years.
What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave: Hollywood to Westwood LA.
Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave: 2008.
Approximate date of your most recent trip to MMs grave: 2012.

Participant 10 - Demographic Info
At the time of the interview, Participant 10 was a 40 year old female living in Littleton, CO. She was a hairdresser. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below:

How many times have you been to MMs grave: 1.
How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.): One time only.
What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave: Denver to LA.
Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave: 2013.
Approximate date of your most recent trip to MMs grave: 2013.
**Participant 11 - Demographic Info**

At the time of the interview, Participant 11 was a 58 year old male living in Quebec City, Canada. He was a government worker. Information the participant reported about the timing, frequency, and number of their visits to Marilyn Monroe’s grave is below.

**How many times have you been to MMs grave:** 4 (1999, 2002, 2006, 2012).

**How often do you visit MMs grave (Only once, every few years, yearly, monthly, etc.):** Every few years.

**What’s the farthest you’ve traveled to visit MMs grave:** Canada to California.

**Approximate date of your first visit to MMs grave:** 1999.

**Approximate date of your most recent trip to MMs grave:** August 2012.
References


Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 34, 199-204.


Curriculum Vitae

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Surjeet Baidwan, J.D., M.B.A.

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts in History, 1998
University of Colorado at Boulder

Master of Business Administration, 2001
Pepperdine University

Juris Doctor, 2002
University of Colorado at Boulder

Dissertation Title: Six Feet from Fame: Exploring Dark Tourist Motivation at Marilyn Monroe’s Grave

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Bo Bernhard, Ph.D.
Committee Member, David Christianson, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Robert Woods, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Lori Olafson, Ph.D.