Exploring Visitors’ Lived Experiences in Memorial Museums

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by

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Chapter I:
Introduction

Millions of people are drawn to memorial museums and other commemorative sites each year (Sharpley, 2009), creating a market for what Lennon and Foley (1996, 1997, 2000) call “dark tourism.” Recently, one particular area of interest within dark tourism research has focused on understanding why people are attracted to these dark sites (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone & Sharpley, 2008; Sharpley, 2014). However, current research on visitors’ experiences and motives for visiting dark tourism sites have been answered only conceptually or with assumptions rather than empirical studies (Cameron & Gatewood, 2012). Many authors (eg. Biran & Poria, 2014; Dann & Seaton, 2001; Lennon & Foley, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000; Kazalarska, 1998; Sharpely, 2014; Stone, 2006; Stone & Sharpely, 2008) have suggested that people in western societies have shown a greater interest in topics related to death and disaster, and are particularly interested in visiting memorial museums and commemorative sites centered around these dark topics. Even so, the existing research on dark tourism provides little understanding of visitors’ experiences and describes them in an abstract and passive manner (Sather-Wagstaff, 2008); There is little research from visitors’ perspective inquiring about the meanings they take away from these sites, what they are experiencing, and what motivates them to visit.

In order to address these issues, an investigation that centers specifically on visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums is needed. A study such as this aims at finding out more about the meanings visitors are taking away from their visits and telling us about what visitors are personally experiencing at memorial museums. A qualitative research approach is needed to provide deeper insight into visitors’ lived experiences in these situations.
**How this Study can Benefit Dark Tourism Research**

Up until now, the research focused on visitors’ experiences at dark tourism sites has either been theoretically based (Biran & Poria, 2014; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone & Sharpley, 2008) or has applied only quantitative methods such as surveys and close-ended interviews to address their questions (Chen, 2014; Sharpley, 2014; Yuill, 2003;). Although these approaches are necessary to further develop the field of dark tourism, they do not provide insights from visitors about their *lived* experiences at dark tourism sites. A qualitative research approach, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), could contribute to current research by providing an analysis from the visitor’s perspective about what it means to experience a memorial museum.

A qualitative approach allows the researcher to focus on gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific phenomenon or situation rather than make broad generalizations about an entire population, common with quantitative methods (Mack et al., 2005). Purposive sampling techniques permit the researcher to direct attention more specifically on a particular group of people, making it appropriate to use a smaller sample size (Hays & Singh, 2012). The smaller sample size in turn makes it possible to collect and analyze rich, detailed data for each participant, something that is hard to do with the large sample sizes usually required when conducting a quantitative research study. Various dark tourism researchers have suggested that a qualitative study may provide further empirical insight to the topic by looking at the phenomenon from a different perspective and potentially provide a better understanding of the visitor experience and motivations for visiting (Biran & Poria, 2014; Cameron & Gatewood, 2012; Williams, 2007).
**Research Study**

The purpose of this study is centered on one specific question: *How do visitors to memorial museums describe their lived experiences?* In order to answer this question, data was collected at the May 4 Visitors Center in Kent, Ohio. The May 4 Visitors Center commemorates the events leading up to and following the tragic shooting and deaths of four Kent State University students by the National Guard in 1970. Using a qualitative approach—Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)—allowed the researcher to focus on a small group of participants (i.e. first time visitors to the May 4 Visitors Center) analyzing them first as individual case studies, then as a whole group to determine if overarching experiential themes amongst participants are present (Smith et al., 2009). By using in-depth semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to engage in purposeful conversations with participants and uncover detailed information about what they felt and thought, and the meanings they made of their experience (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

The goals of this study are to:

- Learn about visitors’ lived experiences at memorial museums and describe meanings made from these experiences;
- Discover (if any) experiential themes are present across visitors; and
- Determine if current descriptions of dark tourists match with visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums from this study.

This study will add to the growing research around dark tourism and provide an additional viewpoint about dark tourists from the visitors’ perspective. The focus on the
visitor’s lived experience can provide insight into the meanings made of memorial museum visits and add to an understanding of the underlying reasoning for attending these sites.

Structure of this Thesis
Following this introductory chapter (1), the remainder of this thesis will be divided into four chapters: Literature review (2), research design and methodology (3), results (4), and discussion (5). Chapter two includes a review of relevant literature that provides a general overview of the rise of dark tourism research, current research related to memorial museums, visitor experience at memorial museums, and lived experience research in the museum. This chapter will also illustrate the potential value that an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study can add to the field of dark tourism research.

The third chapter is about the methodology and research design used in this study. It explains how IPA can be applied as a methodology, why IPA was chosen for this study, and how it is utilized to address this study’s research question and goals. Chapter three also details the research design including site selection, selection of study participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Chapter four provides a summary of the results from analysis and an interpretation of the data utilizing excerpts from participant’s interviews. Finally, chapter five beings with an overview of the findings from the study, outlines the significance of the results, and concludes with final thoughts and suggestions for future research.
Chapter II
Literature Review

The aim of this study is to understand visitors’ lived experiences at memorial museums and gain insight into the meanings they take away from their visit. This literature review provides an overview of the current visitor research related to dark tourism sites and more specifically memorial museums. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, the origins of dark tourism research and its current limitations are examined. Second, a general definition and overview of memorial museums is provided. Last, a selection of lived experience research in the museum is shared, further supporting the need for similar research in memorial museums.

Dark Tourism: Origins and Limitations

Researchers have labeled memorial museums and other commemorative sites by many names, such as: “thanatourism” (Seaton 1996), “heritage of atrocity” (Kazalarska 1998), “tragic tourism” (Lippard 1999) and currently the most popular term, “dark tourism”, first coined by Lennon and Foley (1999) to describe any form of tourism “associated with sites of death, disaster, and depravity” (p. 46). Examples of dark tourism sites include, but are not limited to, Holocaust museums, war memorials, cemeteries, and prison tours. Lennon and Foley (2000) note that the fascination with “dark” topics has been around since well before the twentieth century (i.e. the Rome’s attraction to gladiatorial contests at the Coliseum, or 19th century America’s desire to see the curious and unusual medical abnormalities found in the Mütter Museum). The creation of rapid worldwide media communications to broadcast tragic events is what Lennon and Foley (2000) believe has contributed to the rise of attendance to dark tourism sites. Due to the increase in exposure via news broadcasts, movies, and TV shows reproducing
the events, more people feel a connection to these “dark” moments of history (Lennon & Foley 2000). With a rise in attendance to these sites consisting of people not directly associated with the memorial sites, ethical questions about the exploitation of other people’s tragedies is another concern. (Lennon & Foley 1996). Even though Lennon and Foley’s work has been widely cited and considered pivotal in further developing the field, researchers have argued that their work is based on assumptions, with little evidence or empirical research to back up their claims (Coles, 2002; Sharpley, 2005; Sather-Wagstaff, 2008).

While Lennon and Foley have focused more on entertainment and the commodity value of dark tourist sites, Stone and Sharpley (2008) have begun to explore the relationship between dark tourism and western society’s responses to death and mortality. The authors believe that memorial museums and other commemoratory sites allow visitors to contemplate and confront heavy topics such as death, in a safe environment, which in turn can “ease the sense of dread death inevitably brings, by insulating visitors with information and potential understanding and meaning” (Stone and Sharpley, 2008 p. 588). While the confrontation of mortality is one possible visitor motivation for attending dark tourism sites, Stone and Sharpley (2008) believe additional research is needed to further understand other motivators for visitation. This shift in focus on alternative motivations and meaning-making illustrates an open mindedness to the idea that dark tourists may be getting more than a feeling of entertainment out of dark tourism sites than previously thought (Stone, 2006; Sather-Wagstaff, 2008; Sharpley, 2014).

As dark tourism research continues to grow, one area that has yet to be explored is the lived experience of visitors to dark tourism sites. Cameron and Gatewood (2012) note that understanding what brings people to these types of sites and finding out more about their
personal experiences is a crucial element to dark tourism research, and that current research on these topics has been answered more with “conjecture and anecdotes than with empirical studies” (p. 245). In addition, Biran and Poria (2014) follow up on this point by stating that the current descriptions of dark tourists and their motivations to visit are superficial and a more holistic approach focusing on the relationship between the visitor’s experience and their perception of the site is necessary. To better answer these questions, Williams (2007) stresses the need for qualitative research interested in documenting visitors’ experiences at these sites. While there are many sites that fall under Lennon and Foley’s (1998) broad definition of dark tourism, this study will be focused on one type of site, memorial museums.

Memorial Museums

In order to understand what a memorial museum is, “memorial” and “museum” need to first be defined separately. According to Williams (2007), a memorial is “anything that serves in remembrance of a person or event” (p. 7). This broad definition can take on multiple forms, whether it is a song, speech or monument. A museum is defined here as “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (International Council of Museums, 2007). Williams (2007) further defines memorial museums as, a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historical event that commemorates mass suffering. While other researchers have placed further distinctions on defining memorial museums (Lennon, 1999; Sherman, 1995; Stránský, 1983; Young, 1993), Williams’ (2007) definition will be used for the purpose of this study. Although traditional history museums may
have some overlapping themes with memorial museums, Williams (2007) has assembled a list of differences that further delineate memorial museums from history museums:

- The memorial museum site is usually an integral part of the institution’s identity;
- regular visitors *usually* have a special relationship to the museum (such as individuals who witnessed the event, or friends and family related to victims of the event);
- the museum can be politically active and tends to seek out relationships with human rights organizations and truth and reconciliation commissions in the hopes of resolving past conflict;
- education is an essential part of their mission that may also include a psychosocial element for their work with survivors and family and friends of victims;
- educational work is tied to current issues in society that relate to the institution’s identity that is uncommon in traditional history museums.

Now that we have identified what a memorial museum is (and is not), additional questions can be asked: Why are people drawn to memorial museums? What are people experiencing and taking away from their visit? Should memorial museum be categorized as dark tourism? While the research is limited, the current research on visitors’ experiences in memorial museums is attempting to answer these questions and will be examined in detail in the following section.

**Memorial Museum Visitor Research**

As mentioned previously, Williams (2007) states that in order to better understand visitors’ experiences and motivations for attending memorial museums, a qualitative approach can provide further insight. Several researchers have attempted this, and have contributed
notable findings related to memorial museum visitors. Sather-Wagstaff (2008) for example, utilizes photoethnography and semi-structured interviews to explore how the use of photography by visitors at the World Trade Center (WTC) memorial in New York City influences people’s experiences and memories. The author notes that photography at the WTC memorial has been met with great disdain from many people who believe the action to be disrespectful. Sather-Wagstaff (2008) explains that the main issue related to this viewpoint is the belief that visitor’s photography at the memorial site is used in the same regard as when people visit a site for entertainment: to capture fun and exciting activities, rather than commemorate the aftermath of a tragedy. In order to understand the motivations behind visitors engaging in photography, the author conducted interviews with visitors on site and followed up with a selection of post-visits in order to discover how they are currently using their photographs (Sather-Wagstaff, 2008). What the author’s data suggests is that visitors to these sites are not taking pictures to document an “enjoyable activity” or any other reason that may be disrespectful. In fact, it was just the opposite. Sather-Wagstaff clarifies in her research that visitors note the difference in meaning of photographs of a lighthearted event versus photographs taken at the WTC memorial. Participants took images of objects that were historically significant or provided a personal connection. Furthermore, the photographs were seen as documented proof that the visitors themselves were at this historically significant site, which were then used post-visit to share their stories with others. The photographs become cherished documents that help visitors remember, re-live, and re-tell their experiences, signifying the importance a photograph can carry.

In addition to Sather-Wagstaff’s work, Chen (2014) also studied visitor experiences in
memorial museums by analyzing the visitor comment books at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima, Japan. The museum commemorates the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan by the United States on August 6, 1945, which lead to the deaths of 70,000-80,000 people and left another 70,000 injured (History.com Staff, 2009). In Chen’s (2014) study, a majority of the comments led to reflection about war and the wish for peace, a wish that an event like the Hiroshima bombing should never happen again. Other common themes from the comment books were from survivors, or family members of survivors, expressing the need to share their stories with others and address feelings of sadness and anger over what happened. Visitors mentioned that the sharing of their stories was important in order to keep this tragic event relevant for future generations. While 83 percent of the comments were from people of Japanese descent, Chen (2014) found that international visitors shared similar reflections and feelings of anger and guilt over their own or another’s government role in the bombing.

Similar themes as those found in Chen’s research can be seen in the Smithsonian’s Office of Policy and Analysis report (2003) on visitor experience in the exhibition, September 11, 2001: Bearing Witness to History. Many visitors to this exhibit mentioned feelings of anger and sadness that the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City happened in their country. Others commented on how emotional it was to see other visitors react to the exhibit. Visitors also had a strong connection to the personal stories told by survivors and witnesses to the attacks, feeling like they could put themselves into these people’s situations. Reflections of their own memories of that day were brought up, as people felt the need to share their own stories as well.

Yuill (2003), also interested in the visitor perspective of memorial sites, investigates in
more detail the underlying motivation of visitors attending memorial sites. Using an open-ended survey at the Holocaust Museum Houston, a variety of different visitor motivations were found for visiting the museum, with the two most prominent being education and remembrance. Visitors cited the need to remember such events and inform younger generations in order to avoid similar tragedies in the future (Yuill, 2003). Another motivation was the chance to see personal artifacts from those who lived during the Holocaust. Visitors commented that seeing actual artifacts helped them connect and learn more about the people who lived during this time.

All of these studies demonstrate that there is valuable knowledge to be gained using qualitative methods to research visitors’ experiences and motivations at memorial museum sites. The results shared above suggest that visitors to memorial museums and other commemorative sites may be having deeper and more meaningful experiences than otherwise theorized by Lennon and Foley. However, the research conducted by Sather-Wagstaff (2008), Chen (2014), the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (2003), and Yuill (2003) does not dig deeply into visitors’ lived experiences or underlying motivations at these sites. While Sather-Wagstaff (2008) states that she had over 500 written or recorded conversations related to the World Trade Center memorial, her study never mentions how many participants actually took meaningful and personally significant photographs. Chen (2014) did not interview or collect data from visitors to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial personally, but instead relied solely on data from comment books that were selected by the museum’s editorial board, which limited the amount of detailed data the researcher had access to. The Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (2003) does attempt to go deeper into understanding the visitor experience by
conducting in-person interviews, but the methodology is unclear. Although the report supplies the interview questions asked, it does not state how long the interviews took, how detailed the responses were, or how they were analyzed. In addition, the report does not mention what their strategy was for developing their list of recurring themes. Yuill’s (2003) use of open-ended surveys was not conducted on-site, but instead sent out via mail and email seven months after their initial visit. Not having the face-to-face interaction does not give the researcher a chance to pick up on voice-inflections, hand-gestures, and other subtle nuisances that can greatly impact how a visitors response is interpreted. However, Yuill (2003) does acknowledge this disadvantage and goes on to state that for future research it would be beneficial to conduct in-depth interviews with visitors to memorial museum sites in order to collect richer and more detailed data about their motives.

**Lived Experience Research in the Museum**

Research focused on understanding museum visitors’ lived experiences is not a new development. While there are researchers that explore the lived experiences of visitors in the museum (Arnold et al., 2014; Bedford, 2014; Latham 2009, 2013, 2015; Tam, 2008; Woodbrook, 2012), this section will focus on two particular studies, one by Latham (2009; 2013) and the other by Tam (2008). The former uses an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) to uncover visitors’ lived experience with three-dimensional objects in the museum, while the latter applies a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore non-art experts’ experiences viewing paintings in art museums.

After conducting in-depth qualitative interviews at a variety of museums and analyzing the data of five participants, Latham (2009, 2013), using IPA, suggests that the experiences
visitors have with museum objects can be deeply personal, meaningful, and even spiritual—a numinous experience. She was then able to identify four themes present in a visitor’s numinous experience with objects:

- A unity of emotions, feelings, intellect, experience, and object,
- the object is crucial to the experience – connecting the visitor to the past through the physical presence of the object and the symbolic meaning associated with the object,
- the visitor feels as though they are being transported back in time, and
- visitors make connections bigger than themselves—personal connections are made with one’s self, the past, and something more divine – the spirit, that lasts throughout a person’s life and compels them to share their experience (Latham, 2009).

By allowing visitors a chance to speak in depth about their experiences, Latham was able to gain insight into the personal relationships visitors make with museum objects and capture a detailed description of what museum visitors feel and think during a numinous museum experience.

Tam’s (2008) research focused on a particular group of people commonly overlooked when discussing art experiences– the non-expert. Tam conducted in-depth interviews with eight purposefully selected participants about their lived experience with paintings and found three common themes amongst the group:

- An inability for participants to express how they feel – Participants struggled to find the words to explain how they were feeling. Language could not fully
capture what the person was experiencing.

- **Lost sense of time** – Participants did not speak of time when referring to their experiences. When they were asked about time, they had trouble describing it. The passage of time went unnoticed or the experience was perceived as being shorter than it really was.

- **Lost sense of body** – Participants were not conscious of their body and became immersed in the painting. When a person is fully immersed in a painting, they become unaware of their body and everything else around them.

Through the use of phenomenological methods of data collection, Tam’s (2008) research suggests that previous research (eg. Funch, 1997; Housen, 2001) proposing only art experts can have an experience with paintings that brings about heightened awareness and total absorption is not always correct. The author’s unstructured interviews encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences with art and share detailed descriptions about their experiences, revealing that non-art experts can have just as meaningful an experience with paintings as art experts.

Both of the authors’ research focuses on a particular kind of experience - the lived experience - which allowed the researchers to explore their participants’ unique experiences of a specific situation, in turn providing them with an insiders perspective on how visitors make sense of their experiences (Smith et al, 2009). While each person’s lived experience is subjective and no two people can experience the same situation in the exact same way, both Latham (2009 & 2013) and Tam (2008) discovered that similar experiential themes were present amongst visitors and revealed a detailed description of the commonalities found within
their particular situation or study. Thus, lived experience research can provide another small piece of the large visitor experience picture and help shed light on individuals’ personal and meaningful experiences in memorial museums.

**Conclusion**

The memorial museum is defined as a specific type of museum dedicated to commemorating a historic event of mass suffering. These types of institutions have been associated with a larger area of research known as dark tourism, which includes all sites associated with death and disaster. While there has been a recent surge of interest in dark tourism sites, there has been little research focused on the lived experience of visitors to these sites. The visitor research in memorial museums discussed above does produce insightful results about the visitor’s experience. However, what separates the current memorial museum visitor experience research from that of *lived* experience research is the amount of rich, in-depth data collected from participants. The current visitor experience research at memorial museums suggests that visitors are having meaningful experiences, and further research focused on visitors’ lived experiences to these sites can assist in uncovering a deeper understanding of what they are taking away from their visit. After reviewing a sample of lived experience research in the museum, it is clear that memorial museum research could benefit from the in-depth qualitative data collected from such studies.
Chapter III
Research Design and Methodology

Introduction
For this study, the methodology selected is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA focuses on exploring how people make sense of their personal and social world by studying the ways people make meaning through their lived experiences (Smith & Osborn 2007). Because of its focus on the meaning made through the lived experience, this methodology is appropriate for investigating my research question – How do visitors to memorial museums describe their lived experiences? IPA is also an exploratory form of research; meaning IPA researchers are not looking to test a hypothesis (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Instead, research questions are much more open and researchers are urged to avoid making any assumptions about participants experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA researchers are not interested in developing theories; rather they seek to understand the structure and meaning made during particular situations (Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). Therefore, this methodology made it possible for me to collect rich, in-depth data from participants to gain a better understanding of what visitors take away from memorial museum lived experiences.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part will provide an overview of the three major influences that inspired the creation of IPA – phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideology. The second part outlines a justification for why IPA was chosen to conduct this study and how the methodology is appropriate for the research question. Finally, an overview of the research design of this particular study is discussed, which entails site selection, selection of study participants, data collection methods, and data analysis.
Background of IPA

First developed by psychologist Jonathan Smith in the mid 1990s, IPA is a qualitative research approach that allows researchers to focus on how people make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA focuses specifically on the lived experience of individuals who have gone through similar situations, and explores how they make meaning of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003). By studying peoples’ lived experiences, the researcher can examine specific experiences and be open to the possibility of finding related themes particular to that experience.

*Lived experience* describes when a person becomes fully aware of what is happening around them, which usually arises when something significant happens in their lives (Smith et al., 2009). A lived experience is something that cannot be explained while in the moment; it is only after the experience has happened and a reflection period occurs that people can make meaning of their experience (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA considers a person’s lived experience to be significant because a lived experience is subjective and can only be expressed by the person going through the situation. It is through the person’s expression of the experience that the researcher can gain a better understanding of what that particular person was thinking, feeling, and seeing (Tappan, 1997).

While IPA is a new approach to qualitative research, the methodology draws upon ideas that have been around for a much longer time—phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. These are briefly reviewed below.

**Phenomenology**

Developed by philosopher Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century,
phenomenology is the study of lived experience and consciousness (Giorgi, 1997); it is both a philosophy and a set of methodologies (Larkin et al., 2006). Generally, phenomenological methodologies look closely at an individual’s experience of a situation and attempt to extract from it the essential features of the experience in order to determine the essence of that experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). Husserl defined the process of extracting the essential elements of a phenomenon as phenomenological reduction (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Phenomenological reduction allows the researcher to narrow their attention and disregard any unnecessary information and previously held prejudices in order to focus solely of the phenomenon of study (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Husserl believed that when studying the experience of another individual, one must never assume to know how that person is experiencing a situation, but instead try to remove all preconceptions and try to describe in detail each person’s experience with no interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Even though each person may experience the same situation differently, there are still things they will have in common (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). It is these commonalities, or essences, within a situation that Husserl was looking to uncover.

While Husserl’s work highlighted the importance of the lived experience and provided guidance on how to go about collecting data on such experiences, it is another phenomenologist’s (Heidegger) alternate hermeneutic approach to phenomenology that highlights the importance of interpretation in IPA research.

**Hermeneutics**

One element that makes IPA different from a strictly descriptive phenomenology (i.e. Husserl) is the addition of interpretation. Heidegger’s phenomenological approach emphasized the
importance of hermeneutics, or interpretation, in understanding a person’s lived experience. While Husserl believed it was possible to be completely objective and bracket one’s own assumptions, Heidegger believed that researchers could not fully eliminate their own fore-conceptions (prior experiences, personal beliefs, opinions) when conducting research (Smith et al., 2009). Rather, the meanings a researcher arrives at in their interpretive research are not based solely on the participant, but are actually a blend of meanings derived from both participant and researcher involved in the study (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This dynamic interaction between participant and researcher is known as the double hermeneutic—participants trying to make sense of their experiences, while the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participants making sense of their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This interpretive process cannot take place without the researcher’s own fore-conceptions, for without these fore-conceptions, we would not be able to make sense of and connect with participants’ experiences.

**Idiography**

The final major influence on IPA is idiography, which is the study of the particular (Smith et al., 2009). Idiography places value on the individual case in the same way IPA values the individual experience (Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). While Husserl’s phenomenology was mainly concerned with finding the essence of an experience, IPA researchers are also interested in discovering the differences amongst individuals (Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). Because each participant is treated similarly to that of a case study, IPA researchers use small, purposefully selected groups in order to allow for an in-depth and detailed analysis of each participant (Smith et al., 2009). The analytic procedure of IPA first examines participants on a case-by-case
basis, and then examines the similarities and differences amongst the group (Larkin, 2013). The focus on the particular allows researchers to explore the complexities of each participant’s lived experience and to potentially gain insight into that specific group’s shared experiences.

**Why IPA for this Study?**

As mentioned above, IPA allows a researcher to explore how people make sense of their personal and social world by studying the ways people make meaning through their lived experiences (Smith & Osborn 2007). While research has been conducted on visitor experiences in memorial museums (Chen, 2014; Sather-Wagstaff, 2008; Yuill, 2003), there is not yet research focused specifically on the visitors’ lived experiences of these sites. Many times the meaning of a lived experience for the individual does not occur until the person begins to reflect on their experience (Larkin et al., 2006). By utilizing IPA, I am encouraging participants to actively reflect on their lived experience, which will help shed light on the meanings they make of their experience at memorial museums, contributing to a deeper understanding of these encounters.

In order to capture participants’ lived experiences, the suggested IPA method for data collection involves in-depth, semi-structured interviews, transcription of interviews by researcher, followed by an iterative process consisting of detailed analysis of the data, first on a case-by-case basis then as a whole and back to the individuals again (Smith & Osborn, 2007). IPA research questions are generally broad and open with no predetermined hypothesis made by the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2003), which is why the flexibility of semi-structured interviews is the preferred method for data collection (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The semi-structured style of interviewing allows the researcher to follow up on statements made by the
participant, which can be beneficial when the researcher is trying to get more detail from the participant about their experience.

Due to the intensive nature of this style of research, sample sizes are generally small in size. For first-time IPA researchers Smith et al. (2009) recommends that, “between three to six participants can be a reasonable sample size for a student project using IPA...This should provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants, but not so many that one is in danger of being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated” (p.51).

In addition, Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015), IPA researchers in the LIS field, state that IPA research differs from other qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory, in that grounded theory attempts to establish claims for a larger population, which requires a larger sample size. IPA, on the other hand, is concerned with exploring the similarities and differences of smaller groups, which allows for a smaller sample size. For example, Vanscoy’s IPA study on the lived experience of academic research librarians consisted of eight participants, and Evenstad’s IPA study exploring the lived experience of information and computer technology professionals consisted of three participants (Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). Vanscoy, a more seasoned IPA researcher, was able to successfully manage eight participants, while Evenstad, a PhD candidate, followed the novice researcher recommendation from Smith et al. (2009) and selected three participants. The small sample sizes allow the researcher to spend more time rigorously analyzing each participant, making it possible for the researcher to get a better understanding of how the participant is thinking. By having this deep understanding of the participants, the researcher can then provide a better interpretation of their experiences.
The intent of this study is to gain a better understanding of the meanings people make during memorial museum visits, identify potential themes amongst participants, and to compare these findings with the current research on visitors to memorial museums. These aims align well with IPA assumptions and intentions. The detailed analysis of visitors’ lived experiences to memorial museums and other commemorative sites is something that that yet to be done, and IPA provides the methodological foundation to conduct such a study.

With the methodology chosen, the remainder of this chapter will detail the specific research design of this study (site selection, selection of study participants, data collection methods, data analysis) and provide more detail about the IPA research process.

Research Design

Site Selection

The site where this study took place was the Kent State University May 4 Visitors Center located in Kent, Ohio—a museum and memorial dedicated to the tragic events that occurred on site on May 4, 1970. The May 4 Visitors Center is run by Kent State University and located on campus where the events to place. The visitors center is dedicated to telling the story of the Ohio National Guard shooting that took place at Kent State University over 40 years ago in response to a student-led protest against the Vietnam War. This event tragically left four students dead, one permanently paralyzed and eight others wounded (Mansfield & Vincent, 2012). The May 4 Visitors Center is divided into three gallery spaces:

1. The Context Gallery – Utilizing text, audio, video, and photographs, the Context Gallery provides an overview of what was going on in the United States during 1970 that led to the events leading up to the May 4 shootings.
Topics discussed include, the generation gap, Civil Rights issues, and the Vietnam War.

2. The Movie Gallery – An immersive theater experience presenting detailed accounts of the three days leading up to the shootings, the actual shootings, and the events that unfolded right after. The story is told from all sides by sharing interviews from students, guards, and Kent State professors who were on site during the shootings, as well as local community members.

3. Impact and Relevancy Gallery – This gallery illustrates what happened after the shootings took place at Kent State, and how the events were portrayed in the media. The event sparked global attention, and is exhibited in the gallery through the use of a large three-dimensional headline wall, newspaper clips, and audiovisual clips. Please see Appendix A for a detailed description of the space and an exhibit walkthrough with photos.

As a Kent State University student, the events that occurred on May 4 are deeply personal and meaningful to me, so choosing the visitor center as my research site was based on my personal interest in the history, and also my familiarity with the visitor center and staff. The visitor center also matches the definition of a memorial museum provided by Williams (2007) in chapter two – a museum dedicated to a historical event that commemorates mass suffering.

Selection of Study Participants

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques, which means certain criteria need to be met by participants in order to be utilized in the study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, participants had to be first-time visitors to
the May 4 Visitors Center to ensure they were basing their responses solely on this particular experience. Since IPA researchers are interested in smaller groups, making the sample homogenous creates a focus on a particular group of people (first time visitors to the May 4 Visitors Center) rather than generalizing about the whole population (Vanscoy & Evanstad, 2015). Participants’ personal identification information remained anonymous and no demographic information was collected. Phenomenologists and IPA researchers are not interested in recording demographics because the focus of the research is on the phenomenon being studied (Smith et al., 2009), not on participants’ individual characteristics. IPA researchers aim to reduce the study of the phenomenon or situation to its most basic elements, allowing the researcher to discover what makes up the essential components of the particular experience under study (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

The initial plan for recruitment was as follows: At the museum, if the visitor indicated it was their first time visiting, they were then asked by the May 4 Visitors Center front desk assistant if they would like to participate in a study about their experience with the exhibit. Visitors who showed interest were given a flyer providing a general overview of the research study, which also included my contact information for more details. Once contact was made by the participant and had given consent to proceed, an in-person interview was scheduled at a time and location most convenient to the participant. However, it soon became apparent that having the flyer and a general overview provided by the front desk assistant was not enough to encourage visitors to participate in the study. It was then suggested by my thesis chair and the site’s director, Dr. Farmer, that I go to the May 4 Visitors Center to recruit participants in person. With permission, I sat at the front desk along with the assistant for five days in June.
2015 so I could personally talk to potential participants and answer any of their questions regarding the study. At that time, a slight change was made to the flyer that indicated I would be collecting data until the end of August 2015. By adding this one line, I believe it made interested visitors more inclined to contact me because they knew the study was still active even though they came to the center at a much earlier date.

Data Collection Methods
Since the objective of this study was to explore participants’ lived experiences of a memorial museum, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. IPA aims to collect data that encourages participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and personal stories in great detail, therefore Smith and Osborn (2007) recommend semi-structured, one-on-one intensive interviews. The authors explain their suggestion by stating:

This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise (p. 57).

In order to guide this dialogue between participant and myself as researcher, an interview schedule (Table 1) was created to help determine questions that would help uncover the visitor’s lived experience. Since semi-structured interview questions are broad and open, the interview schedule allowed me to prepare for the interview process, such as how to phrase complex and emotional questions, or ways to probe participants for additional, concrete information (Smith & Osborn 2007).

Table 1: Interview Questions and Probes
Interview Questions and Probes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Questions</th>
<th>Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm-up question: So, what brought you here to the May 4 Visitor’s Center?</td>
<td>How did that make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk me through your experience at the May 4 Visitors Center, providing as</td>
<td>Was there anything in particular that sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much detail as you can.</td>
<td>out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had similar experiences at other memorial museums or commemorative</td>
<td>Can you tell me more about that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sites? Can you take me on a “tour” of those, describing your experience in</td>
<td>What were you thinking during that exact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>detail along the way?</td>
<td>moment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you mean by that?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you tell me more about ________?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe ______ in more detail?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did that experience make you feel?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you tell me more about ________?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Interviews lasted on average 40 minutes, close to the 45-60 minute approximation suggested by Smith et al. (2009) when conducting semi-structured IPA interviews. The data collection process started in June 2015 and continued into August 2015. The interviews were transcribed fully by myself in order to ensure a complete understanding of each case and to transcribe participants’ nuances from the interviews. Prior to the interviews, I started a reflective journal to write down any fore-conceptions brought into the study. While it was impossible to eliminate these fore-conceptions as mentioned earlier, acknowledging that they existed helped me differentiate between my personal opinions and those of the participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). I also kept a reflective journal during the process of transcription and analysis,
which allowed me to keep track of my thoughts along the way.

Prior to conducting interviews with visitors to the May 4 Visitors Center, I decided to complete a practice interview with my friend, Jimi, in order to experience the process of conducting an interview. I decided to interview Jimi because he had not been to the May 4 Visitors Center before, and I wanted to simulate as close as possible the actual interview process. Since this was my first time applying qualitative methods, I decided to transcribe the interview before starting the actual interviews, but did not go through the process of analyzing for themes right away, as I did not want to project those themes onto the actual participants.

Data Analysis
Following the suggested sample size from Smith et al. (2009) for first time researchers, a practice interview and four visitors were interviewed and recorded once consent forms (Appendix B & C) were signed and completed. Three of the four actual interviews (those deemed to have provided the most concrete and articulate descriptions) were transcribed and used for the study. One participant was not selected for transcription due to the lack of detail shared when describing his experience. He also spent a large portion of his interview talking about his political views rather than focusing on his experience at the museum and therefore it was determined that the material was not suitable for analysis.

As stated by Smith and Eatough (2007), the IPA researcher’s priority is to do justice to each case and in order to do that a detailed case-by-case analysis of the transcripts must take place. This process is time consuming and consists of multiple close and detailed readings of the data in order to become familiar with the participant’s explanation of their experience, identifying themes and patterns first on an individual level then on a group level, and ending
with a final write up incorporating the participants’ own accounts of their experiences and the researchers interpretations of the data. (Smith & Eatough, 2007). Since I am a first time researcher, I transcribed and analyzed three interviews, based on the recommendation from Smith et al. (2009) that states any more than three transcriptions can potentially leave the novice researcher overwhelmed with too much data. After the three interviews were transcribed and analyzed, it was then decided that the practice interview I conducted and transcribed previously would be used to compliment the three interviews, because Jimi was able to provide great detail about his experience and further exemplified the themes found present first amongst the three actual participants.

As stated above, IPA follows an idiographic approach that looks first at the particular and then moves on to find broader commonalities. According to Reid et al. (2005):

Analyses usually maintain some level of focus on what is distinct (i.e. idiographic study of persons), but will also attempt to balance this against an account of what is shared (i.e. commonalities across a group of participants) (p. 20).

For this study, I followed Smith et al.’s (2009) outline of the typical process followed by IPA researchers:

• A detailed analysis of each participant’s interview transcription. Each participant should initially be treated as a case study.

• Identify patterns or themes present within each case. This should be done for each case until the researcher reaches redundancy.

• Once each case is looked at individually, the researcher can compare and contrast cases with one another in an attempt to find common themes amongst all cases.
• Search for connections amongst the themes in order to determine how everything fits together. Certain themes may be eliminated or joined with other themes to create broader superordinate themes.

• Once themes are established, provide evidence for each theme in the final write-up by pulling examples from each individual case.

This process illustrates the necessity for the researcher to move from the “part to the whole” or the “particular to the holistic” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 104).

The next step is to pull all of the themes together and make sense of the data – interpret the results. As Reid et al. (2005) note, the themes found amongst participants should form some sort of structure that can be presented in table form, a hierarchy, or a model. As mentioned earlier, the double hermeneutic present in IPA plays an essential role in the final analysis. The researcher is responsible for making sense of the participants’ experiences in a way that is understandable for readers. The researcher must take the themes supported by excerpts from participants’ interviews and offer their own interpretation of what the themes mean (Smith & Osborn, 2007). It is the researcher’s belief that the themes present amongst the cases help provide insight into the overarching lived experience of a particular situation. It should also be noted that IPA research findings are never referred to as facts, but instead are seen as subjective, meaning that transparency from the researcher about all claims is essential (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Vanscoy & Evanstad, 2015; Yardley, 2000).

The following chapter will go into more detail about my specific process for analyzing the data, and provide an in-depth look at the common themes found amongst the participants using their own words as examples.
Chapter IV
Results

As stated above, IPA focuses on the lived experience of individuals in similar situations, and explores how they make meaning of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In-depth interviews allow the researcher to examine specific experiences in an attempt to uncover related themes particular to that experience. During this analysis, interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The text was then reread several times in conjunction with the audio recordings in order to extract themes from each interview. After analyzing each participant on an individual level, I began to examine the participants’ experiences as a group and was able to find similarities. Four overarching themes were found present amongst all participants: Connecting the past to the present, putting oneself in the situation, justifying emotional reactions, power of multimodality. By thoroughly analyzing the data collected from my interviews, I was able to accomplish the goals I initially set for this study, which were to:

- Learn about visitors’ lived experiences at memorial museums and describe meanings made from these experiences;
- Discover (if any) experiential themes are present across visitors; and
- Determine if current descriptions of dark tourists match with visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums from this study.

The remaining portion of this chapter will be divided into four parts. The first part will introduce the participants interviewed for this study. The second part will provide an overview of the themes and go over in detail how participants described their lived experience at the May 4 Visitors Center. I will then give a general description of each of the four themes listed above
and use extracts from each participants interview to support my interpretations of their experiences. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the analysis and discuss the significance of the four themes.

**Introduction to Participants**

This section provides a brief introduction to the four interviewees selected for this study. The real names of the participants have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

**Jimi** – Jimi was two when the shootings occurred, and considered himself familiar with the events that occurred on May 4, 1970 prior to entering the exhibit. He joined the army right out of high school, and attributes many of his strong reactions to the May 4 Visitors Center to his experience as a soldier. He is currently a full time salesman and freelance writer.

**Judy** – Judy was a college student during the time of the May 4 shootings and was an active participant in student council. Her husband is a Kent State University alumnus, and they came back to visit the campus and the museum on alumni day.

**Daniel** – Daniel was a student activist during the time of the shootings, and personally knew someone who was on Kent State University’s campus May 4. He was drafted into the Army during the time of the Vietnam War, but was not sent to Vietnam. Daniel is currently a grade school teacher and a father of two children.

**Kendall** – Kendall was also a student during the time of the shootings, and can recall hearing about the events on the news. She grew up in a family of hunters, and feels her familiarity with guns impacted her response to the events. Kendall and her family came to Kent State University to visit her niece, and her mother-in-law suggested they go to the May 4 Visitors Center.
Overview of Themes

Interpretative phenomenological studies focus on uncovering underlying themes within a specific situation (Smith et al., 2009). To emphasize further, IPA researchers are not interested in developing theories and claims about a large population, rather the emphasis is on a smaller group of people (Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). Keeping this in mind, my study focused on first-time visitors to the May 4 Visitors Center can begin to shed light on visitors’ overall experiences at memorial museums, but the themes discussed below are by no means meant to be defined as universal.

By setting out to uncover how visitors to memorial museums describe their lived experiences, I identified four overarching themes from the data collected:

1. *Connecting the past to the present*: The person connects events memorialized in the museum to current events.

2. *Putting oneself in the situation*: The person makes a strong connection with those involved in the events memorialized, and realizes, “that could have been me”, or asks themselves, “what would I have done?”

3. *Justifying emotional reactions*: Participants felt a need to explain why they reacted to the information on exhibit in a particular way. When participants had a strong reaction to a particular portion of the exhibit, they had to recall past experiences that led them to feel so strongly.

4. *The power of multimodality*: There is recognition of an enhanced experience due to the various ways information is presented in the exhibit (i.e. text, graphics, photographs, audio, video).
The theme, *connecting the past to the present*, is about participants making links from past events to present day events. When participants were able to make these associations at the May 4 Visitors Center, it seems their ability to develop emotional connections to the content increased. The comparison to then and now brings the past events back into the present and reveals the relevancy of the May 4 shootings today.

*Imagining oneself in the situation* is seen when participants envision themselves in the events. They try to imagine what it was like to witness the events and describe what they think they would have done in the situation. Although participants ask themselves questions such as, “would I have reacted differently”; “would I have run”; “would I have been so shocked”; they were unable to answer these questions with certainty, or they “couldn’t even imagine” what it was like. It seems these reflections are strong elements that make the memorial museum experience memorable.

The events described at the May 4 Visitors Center have the ability to elicit strong emotional responses from visitors, and when the participants of this study shared their reactions they felt a need to *justify their emotional reactions*. When participants discussed an emotional element of the May 4 site, they had to explain why they were reacting to strongly by citing past experiences that affected their interpretation. The explanations varied and participants mentioned personal upbringing, their culture, and military background as their reasoning for justification.

The last theme, *power of multimodality*, highlights the importance of using different modes of interaction in the exhibit space. The May 4 Visitors Center uses text, photographs, audio, video, graphics, and objects to tell the story of the events surrounding the May 4
shootings, and each participant recognized and appreciated the design of the exhibit. The exhibit “flowed,” was “easy to follow”, and was “manageable”—all phrases used by participants to describe the design and layout. All participants stated the design was enhanced due to the inclusion of different modes of “media” to tell the story. The inclusion of the different modes seemed to keep visitors engaged and interested in the story, and contributed to their overall experience.

If the reader in unfamiliar with or has never been to the May 4 Visitors Center, the exhibit walkthrough (Appendix A) will make it easier to understand participants’ descriptions of specific elements within the visitors center discussed below.

Connecting the past to the present
The theme connecting the past to the present is about making connections between the May 4 events to something happening in the present moment. Each participant made connections to present times, but used various examples to describe this connection. For example, Judy made the connection when she was driving home from the exhibit while passing by the Kent State University fraternity houses:

J: ...we've gone through this very serious...thoughtful process, and...young students that were sitting outside these frat houses drinking beer on a Saturday were those same kids that would have been sitting on that hill. Not drinking beer, but just hanging out. And...without any thought of not being in a safe place. And, it's that part of college life [that] hasn't changed from my generation to yours. And it's fine. I'm not saying it's bad, I'm not. But I guess what I'm saying, I'm looking at those—those students sittin' on a
porch thinking, well, there just gonna stroll over the hill without a thought in the world, and that's exactly what a lot of those people did on May 4.

Daniel found his connection to present times by comparing the shootings at May 4 to the shooting of the black teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, MO by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, and believes the military approach to “quell dissent” is “still with us”:

D: I was struck by the range...of distance from the shooters to the victims – something like 200 feet to almost 800 feet. Which to me, reinforces the idea of indiscriminate...firing. Um...*sigh*...I'm kind of rambling here.

I: No, you're fine.

D: See, I think that we have a very violent society. I'm really disheartened [by] what happened in Ferguson, for example. And elsewhere, so clearly this military approach to...quell dissent or...demonstration it's still—it's still with us. And I think that probably that's the most important reason for an exhibit like the one at Kent. Hopefully people can recognize we have to stop doing these sorts of things, but...you know, we don't seem to learn the lesson.

It was clear through the tone and emotion in Daniel’s voice that the events of May 4 are very personal to him. When asked if he thinks of the May 4 incident when events like Ferguson occur, he goes on to state that he views them being on the same “continuum”: 
...the continuum...is that we still have a violent reaction to anybody or, you know, any ideas that are foreign to the powers that be. We still have a violent response to that. And that has to stop...(p. 20).

Jimi, makes a connection not to the actual May 4 shootings, but to the Civil Rights Movement presented in the Context Gallery at the beginning of the exhibit, by comparing the struggle of black people fighting for rights, to the struggle of gay people currently fighting for their right to marry:

So, you go off and start with the civil rights part and.. there are pictures of, you know, Martin Luther King, who I have a huge fascination with and have read a ton of stuff about. One thing that really kind of struck me— one thing that really did strike me as I was looking at that part of it were the people that were doing something about it— and not the black people, the white people who were doing something about it, and I thought about now...especially with gay people...with what's going on. And it's great. You know, straight people are standing up for gay people finally, really standing up for them, but not like they were then. Then it was very much more radical. They were...sitting themselves in front of places and if it got vi— I mean, I don't want there to be violence and people to get hurt but...they were doing something physical. ...But I know that's one thing that I was— connection then to now in that first part was people taking action to correct a wrong.
In Kendall’s case, she believes that the story of the May 4 shootings told in the exhibit has the potential to save lives by teaching visitors history. She uses the phrase, “if you don’t learn history, you re-live history” to get her point across that it’s important for current students to understand what happened:

And I know that it can be difficult for people, but again, I think it’s really important. You know, if you have nothing else from me, if you have...one person a day walk away from there and take that one comment, “we never thought the bullets were real”... And if they get into a situation [and] they're like, oh, wait a minute. And possibly save a life for that, yea it may be opening up old wounds, but it may actually be saving somebody too.

While Kendall is not making a direct comparison to a specific event like the other participants, by suggesting that a person could “get into a situation” similar to May 4 she is saying that it is possible for something like May 4 to happen again.

*Imagining oneself in the situation*

In every interview of this study, each participant at some point reflected on what it would have been like if they were at Kent State the day of the shootings. Thoughts such as “what would I have done?” or “it could have been me” were continuously brought up throughout the interview process.

Daniel seemed to relate most to the feeling of “it could have been me”. He made it clear at the beginning of the interview that he had also been a student activist, and had participated in demonstrations related to civil rights and the Vietnam War often. Also, Daniel grew up in
Ohio—the state of the shootings—and went to a small university within driving distance of Kent State University. Because of this connection, he stated repeatedly in his interview that “it could have been me” or “I could have been there,” because he very well could have been in the area and a participant in the protest. One example in particular that “struck a cord” (his words) with Daniel was when he saw a picture of singer David Crosby with his dad, leading Daniel to reflect on his experiences with his own father:

...the photograph of David Crosby and his father in their living room, that could have been me and my dad easy. You know, cause that's the way we looked. And he was of that generation, he couldn't understand what I was doing. He worked for [company named removed], and he was a[n] executive (p.8). ...There was an incident - Hooker Chemical was the name of the company...and they were the ones who were responsible for the Love Canal incident. And I don't know if you know this chapter, but it was one of the instances where people had buried their refuse from the industry and then on top of that they built a housing development, ...and within a generation you had all kinds of birth defects, and cancers, and you name it. ...So I called my father to task, I said, look what— look what your industry's responsible for? So, yea. I could have been in that photograph with them.

While Daniel can easily relate to the students involved, he is also able to imagine himself as being one of the parents of the students who died, specifically Alison Krause’s mother. Now as a father of two, he is able to look at the situation from a different perspective:
Allison Krause's mother wrote something that's on the wall [in the gallery] I think...I
can't remember what it was, but I can't imagine sending my child to a University and, as
Allison Krause's mother clearly had, she was supportive of her daughters dissent, and
her right to dissent. And I would [have] been of the same mind. And...to see the death
of a child as a result, partially as a result of that [way of thinking], how does she live with
it? Because at some point it has to come back to haunt you, I encouraged her to
question, you know? Now she's dead.

He goes on to talk about his children and how he hopes they “never have to live through
anything like that” which also links to the first theme, connecting the past to the present. By
making a statement of hope- hoping that something doesn’t happen, that means he believes it
is something that could happen in the present.

Judy had a similar experience as Daniel, from the perspective of a parent. She discusses
what its like to send your child off to college and the thought of something like May 4
happening “doesn’t even cross your mind” (Judy’s words). In a college environment, you expect
the students to be safe. “It's not like they were in Vietnam, it's not like they were in a war
zone”.

When thinking about the situation from the student’s perceptive, she starts to reflect on what
must have been going through their minds at the time:
...and obviously you're a lot younger than me, but I mean if you look at it and you think to yourself, what would you do in that moment? And as a younger person how would you know what to do?

Based on Judy’s response of questioning what you “would do in that moment”, I asked her what she would have done if she was there, and at first she replied, “I don’t know...I don’t know...I don’t know”, but towards the end of the interview she revisited the question in detail:

I think another thing, you asked me a question earlier, what would I do if I saw that happening? And it was interesting, when you watch the video...and I understand this on some level, but you just see everybody running away from it. But, on the other level, it's very interesting that there were people wounded and there were people down, and there were people just running the other direction. And you see these pictures of these kids just down on the ground, alone, scared, shot, or [they] broke a leg running, or who the heck knows. And then you just see people...running away from it. And it made me think, to your point, if I was standing there or you were standing there what would we do? Would we have run? Or would we have grabbed a friend and taken that damaged friend with us? You don't know at that moment.

I: Yea, you can’t.

J: You don’t know. But it just—it just made me think about that. I thought a lot about that.
While Judy’s initial response to my question, “what would you have done?” was ‘I don’t know’, she later responded in more detail and ended her response by saying “I thought a lot about that”. This suggests that after her visit to the May 4 Visitors Center Judy had thought about what she would have done during the shootings more than she realized.

When Kendall was talking about her experience of the May 4 exhibit, one of the main things she consistently brought up through the entire interview was that she couldn’t believe the students thought the guns weren’t loaded with real bullets. Most of the questions I asked led her back to this point, so when it came to imagining herself in the situation, it was related to the students’ reactions to live bullets being fired:

K: I think maybe because I’m a little more pragmatic, or maybe because my husband is a hunter and I do see that, I guess I kinda thought, would I have been so shocked? I don’t know... Could I relate at that time? Would I have related? Would I have felt the same thing? If I had been on campus, would I have been as surprised? Or would I have been...not different, but would I have been a little more accepting of...yes, this is what can happen, and I don't know.

I: You don't know.

K: Right. Fortunately, even though I was near some demonstrations and whatnot I never had to deal with that. And so, you know, emotions are kind of like, what would I have done? Would I have been as naive? Would I have been as surprised? I don't know.
Similar to Judy, Kendall repeatedly asked herself, “what would I do?” “how would I react?”

These reflections about the self were brought on when discussing highly emotional portions of the exhibit. For Judy, it was seeing video of students running away from the soldiers and leaving the wounded behind alone. For Kendall, it was hearing the students speak about their disbelief of the soldiers using live bullets, and the “shock and the horror” that commenced right after the shootings.

Jimi expressed that the exhibit made him “feel like [he] was there”, but as an observer. He wasn’t with the students or with the guards, but was able to see the event from “360 degrees”:

Reading something in a book never does an event justice. You know, this...this was— I was there; I was standing on the hill watching it. I was— I wasn’t being shot at, I was standing off to the side watching it happen.

Jimi’s experience is unique from the other participants, in that he didn’t place himself into the situation by relating to the students, soldiers, or parents, but he was still able to see himself standing on the hill, and became an objective observer. Jimi’s viewpoint could possibly be related to his age, since he was only two when the shootings occurred.

Justifying emotional reactions

The theme, justifying emotional reactions, is signified in each of the participants’ interviews when they felt a need to share stories from their personal life in an attempt to explain why they were feeling a certain way. As mentioned earlier, all of the participants were
alive when the May 4 events occurred, and three of them were also in college at that time, possibly making it easier for them to connect on a personal level to the event because they have actual memories of the event. However, being old enough to remember the event is not the only connection that was made. For instance, Daniel was a student activist at the time and knew other students who were actually at Kent State during the shootings:

I recently spoke with a friend who was at Kent at the time, and he was standing behind a metal barricade of some sort, and bullets struck the barricade (p. 2)

For Daniel, being able to relate to the students as an activist combined with actually knowing someone who was at the shootings made that emotional connection to the exhibit more immediate and strong. He told me many stories about what he believed politically at that time and what he fought for as an activist, and how the exhibit brought back many vivid memories of this time.

For Judy, she described her experience at May 4 as powerful because she lived through it, but she described a more powerful connection to another memorial museum – the Holocaust Museum of Detroit. Judy mentioned previously in her interview that she was of Jewish decent, and had also been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. and Israel. Here Judy was asked if her experience at the May 4 Visitors Center was similar to her experience at the Holocaust Museum of Detroit.
It's similar. It's similar, but quite frankly, it was even- it was much more intense, at least for me at those Holocaust museums. And that just- this [May 4] jars me, that [Holocaust Museum] really jars me to my soul.

While Judy did not live through the Holocaust, the justification of sharing the same ethnic and cultural background with those who experienced the Holocaust illustrated why her feelings were so strong. Judy's Jewish heritage connection was brought up again when describing her reaction to finding out three of the four students killed on May 4 were Jewish. She noted it was an “odd coincidence” that all three of the Jewish students just happened to be there at that time. The tone of her voice made it seem as if she was questioning if the guardsmen shootings were truly random, or if they were targeting specific people.

Kendall had such a strong reaction to the students not thinking the national guard had real bullets, and justified this reaction due to her families background as hunters and familiarity with guns:

I: You said one of things that surprised you was the live bullet comment. That they didn’t expect that. Why? Can you just explain that a little more?

K: Yea, because- maybe because I was raised with uncles who went hunting, and, ya know my husband hunts, and we do have guns. I would never presume that gun is not loaded. I don’t know how familiar you are with guns, but there are some guns that it takes an awful lot to load 'em. Like a muzzle loader or some of the old style pistols where you have to actually put the charge in. What they use in Gettysburg. Other than
that, and even that I wouldn't necessarily assume. I would never ever assume that a gun was not loaded. And I think somewhere along the line somebody said that they thought they were just rubber bullets. I would never assume that either. So, ya know, is that a matter of your upbringing? Probably to some extent. Is it a matter of thinking that, ok in the past they used rubber bullets? Maybe. But it just totally amazed me that...for whatever reason that they were that naive.

Kendall’s reaction is an example of how personal upbringing influences how one views the world around us. It was hard for Kendall to relate to the students reactions to the guns and the shooting aftermath because of her personal knowledge of guns.

For Jimi, his strong emotional response to the shootings and lack of military leadership was initiated by his background as a soldier, and describes himself as being a soldier “until the day I die”:

And it's funny, because when I was looking at the Vietnam thing I was sympathizing with the soldiers. When I was looking at the Kent thing all I could think of was why wasn't- I wanted to scream out, "what are we doing?!" Well, ‘we’ wouldn't have been we because I would have never done that. Um... majority of what I was thinking about was the soldiers. I wasn't really thinking about the kids that were protesting or getting shot at, or being pointed at, I was looking at the soldiers goin', how is this happening? And that's because I was a soldier (p. 18).
Each participant that I spoke with comes from a different background, which shapes the way they view the exhibit. While these participants can share similar emotions, how they come to understand what is being presented to them is guided by their personal perspective on life and previous experiences. Moreover, in order to share their understanding of the information, they feel it necessary to justify their reaction by telling stories from their past that clarify why they are interpreting the information as such.

*The power of multimodality*

Throughout each interview, all participants mentioned that the layout and design of the exhibit enhanced their experience. Everyone was able to provide specific examples of how the expressing of information in various forms made their experience more memorable. While their examples varied, each participant expressed that the inclusion of multiple modes made the exhibit stronger:

From Daniel:

> I thought that there was a good mixture of audio and visual... you know, and clearly, as someone [referring to the interviewer] interested in developing those kinds of exhibits, you understand how important it is to touch as many of our senses as is possible.

Daniel repeatedly made comments about the audio in the exhibit, in particular the music in the Context Gallery, which had quite an emotional effect on him.
...Music always reminds people of time and place and circumstances. I mean it does for all of us. And it may not be exactly the same place or whatever, but it provides a feel... and, you know, so [the] music stimulated memory for me.

Right after this point in the interview, Daniel explained how he “remembered exactly where [he] was and talking to whom” the day the shooting occurred, hinting that the music was able to assist in bringing that memory back to the forefront of his mind.

He also goes on to mention that he had been to other memorial museums, more specifically, Gettysburg, and how it didn't have the same “feel” as May 4 because it did not include enough multimedia; it’s just “statues all over the place”. In this excerpt, he goes on to describe the audio tour at Gettysburg:

And now you can get a recording, and so, when somebody is telling, ok, here's where this event took place, and can you see where this charge was? etc. And it's very detailed, it's very well done, don't misunderstand, but I don't think it has the potential for all the power that the multimedia does.

Kendall discussing how the layout of the exhibit made the story of the events easy to follow:

...It was really, to me, well laid out I think. From the stand point of, you know, ok, here's this, and here's what happened, and then having the photos and the different sayings, and quotes, and whatnot hanging down, it really made it more like a timeline that you can follow.
In addition to the text and pictures, when asked to recall her experience in the exhibit, Kendall says that, “of course” she remembers watching the movie in the Movie Gallery, implying that the movie is something everyone would remember watching.

Judy mentioned repeatedly how “manageable” the exhibit was, and how great the space “flowed”:

...There was a lot of information, and a lot of different—what's the word I'm looking for...media. Different modes of providing that information, and that was good. And I think that probably was a positive. That was definitely one of the things that made it more interesting as you walk from section to section, and with different modes of media that were used. I also now remember there were also many articles on display [referring to Impact and Relevancy Gallery], blown up and on display, from newspapers around the country. I liked that the articles were blown up and large, and you could get close and read them, as opposed to copies you might see like in a glass case.

Jimi was also drawn to the “three dimensional” aspect of the headline wall in the Impact and Relevancy Gallery, explaining:

...Again, not looking at headlines on the internet, or headlines in a book...they were on these boards, and these boards came out off the wall, and it made them three dimensional. They are just words on a board, but it made them three dimensional to me.
He also goes onto describe his experience watching the video in the Movie Gallery and how everything in the exhibit “unified” after watching the events on screen:

J: I don't think it would have been the same without the video, without the film. I don't think it would have been as impactful as it was. It would have been impactful, for sure, but the video was the difference. The video is what changed me. That's where I became horrified, was the film. And then anger. You know, I was angry. I was hurt, I was scared, I was— I was all these negative emotions, but all that came from the film.

I: And it was the film that made you feel like you were there? (Referring to an earlier comment made by the participant.)

J: Yea

I: That's what you said.

J: Yes, but as I was kind of saying before...all those other things did too. But without the film they didn't...Now the exhibit is a whole piece. Had there been no film it would have been like following a timeline. But with the film, it was life and all that stuff that went around—it was all part of it— it was like it was all the film. There is no separation between these pictures and words, printed words and the film. There was no separation, it all went together, it was all an exhibit, it made the exhibit, it unified the exhibit.
Jimi expresses that it was not only the film, but the film in conjunction with the text, photos, and three dimensional wall that made the experience so powerful. The different modes of interaction came together to create an experience that “changed” Jimi, and the events that took place at May 4 “will never be same” to him.

As seen from the excerpts from each participant, it’s not necessarily one thing in particular that made the exhibit experience memorable for everyone, but it was the combination of the audio, pictures, quotes, and movie that made the experience, as Jimi would say, “unified.”

Summary of Results

After in-depth analysis of four interviews, four themes appear to be at the center of a memorial museum experience: connecting the past to the present, imagining oneself in the situation, justifying emotional reactions, and power of multimodality. These overarching themes should not be looked at entirely as separate entities, as many of the examples shared above can be seen as representing more than one theme at a time. The data suggests that these themes are the center of a multi-faceted experience uniquely felt by each participant, and while each is different, ultimately it is suggested that the four themes derived from the participants’ experiences in this study can be seen as the foundation of the lived experience to memorial museums.

The themes connecting the past to the present and imagining oneself in the situation allow the person to make connections not only with current events, but also with themselves. Justifying emotional reactions occurs when visitors can make a strong connection to the events,
which is usually seen when visitors have experienced the first two themes (connecting the past to the present and imagining oneself in the situation). The justifying occurs when participants believe an explanation is needed as to why they reacted so strongly. In order for visitors to have these experiences, the data suggests that the exhibit must be designed in a visually pleasing and engaging manner, leading to the final theme, *power of multimodality*. While presenting information in multiple formats is only one element to creating an emotional and memorable memorial museum experience, it appears that the inclusion of different modes of interaction makes it easier for visitors to become immersed in the exhibit story, and bring the events back to life.
Chapter 5
Discussion

While this study is only one small exploration, the findings suggest that lived experience research in memorial museums can provide valuable insight into the meanings visitors make of their visit. Additionally, the qualitative process suggested by IPA made it possible to conduct an in-depth textual analysis, leading to findings that illustrate the lived experience of a memorial museum is rich and complex. In addition to memorial museums, the field of dark tourism could benefit greatly from additional research using a lived experience approach in order to gain a better understanding how people make meaning at these sites.

This final chapter begins with a summary of the research findings, and is followed by a discussion on the significance of the study. Next, I will review the problems and limitations faced during this study, and how the research could be improved. Finally, I will present final thoughts about how this study has changed my perception of dark tourism and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Summary of research findings
This study was designed to answer the question, what is the lived experience of visitors to memorial museums? In order to answer this question, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was designed with three goals in mind: Learn about visitors’ lived experiences at memorial museums and describe meanings made from these experiences; Discover (if any) experiential themes are present across visitors; and determine if current descriptions of dark tourists match with visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums from this study. After
conducting four in-depth interviews with visitors to the May 4 Visitors Center and analyzing them, four overarching themes emerged across the participants: connecting the past to the present, imagining oneself in the situation, justifying emotional reactions, and power of multimodality. While one cannot make the assumption that these same themes will apply to all visitors in all memorial museums, the results do shed light on how visitors relate to and make meaning of their visit at these types of sites. The first theme, connection the past to the present, occurs when the person connects the topics or events discussed in the exhibit to current times. Imagining oneself in the situation refers to when the visitor makes a strong connection with those involved in the events surrounding the topic of the memorial museum, and reflects on ideas such as, “that could have been me”, or asks themselves, “what would I have done?.” The next theme, justifying emotional reactions, was illustrated when participants felt a need to share personal stories from their past in order to justify why they were feeling a certain way. It was not enough to express their emotion; they needed the researcher to understand why they were having such a strong reaction. The fourth and final theme, power of multimodality, all participants explicitly recognized that their experience was enhanced due to the incorporation of multiple ways of receiving information, i.e. through text, images, audio, and film recordings.

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that visitors to memorial museums are having complex and rich experiences, and not attending solely for entertainment purposes (Lennon and Foley, 1999) or to confront their own mortality (Stone and Sharpley, 2008), demonstrating that lived experience research has the potential to enhance our understanding of visitors to memorial museums and other dark tourism sites. While Lennon and Foley (2000) were concerned about the exploitation of other people’s tragedies due to memorial museums
being commodified as a trendy new tourist destination, the data from this study shows that visitors attending these sites are having deeply personal and reflective experiences that by no means would be considered distasteful or disrespectful. In fact, after going through the exhibit, one of the participants (Daniel) became inspired to help others through volunteering:

D: It [the exhibit] renewed my need to be more committed. There are a lot of things you can do. Poverty is awful in this country, people are hungry, there are things to do. You can volunteer, which I do, but I got to do more...And I think that’s the most long lasting and powerful effect, is that it may not be the same issue, but...people need to get off their duff and do something, you know?

Another participant, Jimi, also stated multiple times how he originally thought he knew what happened on May 4, but after going through the exhibit he realized he didn’t know much of anything. He now feels that if someone were to say something inaccurate about the May 4 events he would have to correct them:

J: It changed me in that I was kind of there...now...and I will defend that moment. I will defend any misinformation of that moment.

These examples from Daniel and Jimi suggest that while presenting information about tragic events may be painful, good things can come from such an exhibit, whether it be encouraging people to help others, or educating others about what really happened.

Significance of the study

This study made significant contributions in three ways. First, one of the goals of this study was to determine if current descriptions of dark tourists match with visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums from this study. Chen (2014), Sather-Wagstaff (2008), the
Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (2003), and Yuill (2003) presented patterns amongst visitors to memorial museums that align with the themes found in this study. For example, in three of the studies, visitors felt a need to share their own personal stories related to the event and express their emotions about what happened (Sather-Wagstaff, 2008, Chen, 2014, and Smithsonian’s Office of Policy and Analysis, 2003). This aligns with the theme, justifying emotional reactions from the present study, where participants felt they had to share stories from their own past in order to better articulate why they were interpreting the exhibit in a particular manner. Yuill (2003) noted that visitors to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Houston often expressed the importance of remembrance and educating younger generations. While this was not one of the overarching themes of the present study, Daniel and Kendall both mentioned the importance of memorial museums educating younger generations as well, which suggests that exploring the role of education and remembrance in the memorial museum may be something to investigate in future studies.

Another significant contribution of this study was the use of qualitative methodology, specifically IPA, to collect in-depth data about the visitor, and focus on the lived experience of individual’s experiences. The data collected suggests that visitors to memorial museums are having deeply emotional and memorable experiences influenced by their ability to make personal connections with the topics presented in the memorial museum. These findings illustrate that studying a visitor’s lived experience can assist in increasing our understanding of why visitors attend memorial museums, and what they get out of their visit. Finally, the present study expanded on already published themes in memorial museum research by Yuill (2003), Chen (2014), Sather-Wagstaff (2008), and the Smithsonian Office of
Policy and Analysis (2003), and was able to uncover four experiential themes central to memorial museum visits:

1. Visitors being able to connect past events with the present day (*connecting the past to the present*),
2. Providing visitors with enough of an emotional connection that they can imagine themselves in the event or ask themselves, “what would I do?” in a similar scenario (*imagining oneself in the situation*),
3. Allowing visitors to express why they reacted a certain way to the exhibit. Giving them the opportunity to explain their emotional reactions is important (*justifying emotional reactions*), and
4. Highlighting the role multimodality plays in supporting a memorable and meaningful memorial museum experience (*power of multimodality*).

These themes should be considered as a group that make up the lived experience of memorial museums, and not be treated as separate elements. No theme can be seen as more important than the other; they contribute to the visitor’s unique experience by presenting themselves at different capacities. Some visitors may be influenced more by the multimodality of information while others may be influenced more by placing themselves in the situation, but nevertheless each theme is present amongst all participants of this study.

**Limitations**

There are two limitations I will mention in this section. First, as a first time researcher, I acknowledge that my lack of interviewing experience influenced the amount of detailed descriptions I was able to obtain from the participants of this study. During the transcription
phase, there were many times were I wish I could go back and ask the participant to tell me more about what they just said, or ask a follow-up question. For example, I should have probed further into why the Holocaust Museum of Detroit was so powerful for Judy. Equally, I would have liked to ask her more about why she thought three of the four students who were killed on May 4 was an “odd coincidence.” Judy was my official first interview, and I was very nervous throughout the entire process. Smith et al. (2009) states that IPA interviews should be around 45-60 minutes each, while my interviews averaged around 40 minutes. If I had been more comfortable with my ability to ask questions in response to participants’ descriptions, I believe I could have recorded much more valuable data about their experiences.

Another limitation in this study is that all participants were alive when the May 4 shootings occurred. As mentioned earlier, convenience sampling techniques were used to select participants, and the first three people to respond were born after 1970. Was this study affected by the age of the participants? It would be interesting to investigate if visitors in their 20s have as strong a reaction as those who remember when May 4 happened. Furthermore, I had willing participants who were visiting from out of state, but due to time restrictions, I was unable to interview them. IPA research is best conducted in-person, because it allows the researcher and participant to build a personal connection through discussion that is more difficult to do by phone or email (Smith et al., 2009). Three of the four people actually interviewed for this study are natives of Ohio, and the last participant was from a nearby city. Interviewing others who lived farther away from Kent would have been helpful in understanding if the role of a person’s physical proximity to the events plays a role in their ability to make meaningful connections.
**Final thoughts**

After a complete analysis of this study, more questions arise about what “dark tourism” really means. Although Lennon and Foley’s (1999) definition states that dark tourism is any form of tourism “associated with sites of death, disaster, and depravity” (p. 46), the main problem with this definition is that it does not take into consideration visitor experience. For example, Stone (2006) attempts to further distinguish what a dark tourism site is by creating a “dark to light spectrum.” Sites of *actual* death and suffering (i.e. Auschwitz concentration camp) are considered “darker” in nature, while sites *associated* with death and suffering (i.e. US Holocaust Memorial Museum) are deemed “lighter.” Stone goes on to list other factors that influence this spectrum, such as the importance of time scale and location authenticity, but none of the suggested elements address the visitor’s experience. Using the May 4 Visitors Center as an example, while this would be considered darker on Stone’s spectrum, the experiences described by participants in this study would not be best categorized as “dark”. However, labeling their experiences as “light” is not correct either. Referring to the participants interviewed for this study as “dark tourists” seems to downplay their meaningful experiences at the museum. When looking at a list of synonyms in Merriam-Webster Thesaurus (2015) for *dark* some of the first words that appear are, “black, evil, immoral, and vile”. Similarly, the term *tourist* does not seem fitting when describing the participants for this study. A tourist is defined as “a person who travels for pleasure” (Merriam-Wester Dictionary (2015), and the first words associated with tourist are, “rubbernecker and excursionist” (Merriam-Webster Thesaurus, 2015). Are these the words we want visitors to memorial museums and commemorative sites to be associated with? Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) back up this viewpoint by stating,
‘dark’ labels present a framework in which tourists appear to be delimited in specific ways: as ‘mere’ tourists, as tourists drawn to ‘dark’ sites, and as individuals who are likely to behave in a way some deem inappropriate. In light of such negative connotations, we suggest that it may be time to abandon the term ‘dark tourism’... (p. 199)

It is true that many memorial museums and commemorative sites deal with “dark” topics, but it does not seem appropriate to refer to them as “dark tourists”, which is why the term is never used to describe the participants of this study.

What this study reveals is that dark tourism should not be defined based on the “darkness” of the content, but should instead be based on visitors’ experiences. Just because the topic is dark, does not mean the visitor’s experience will be dark. While the term “dark tourism” may apply to other tourist destinations, I believe memorial museums should be removed from this category, and visitors should be referred to as memorial museum visitors or, quite simply, museum visitors. It would be interesting to explore in future research how memorial museums fit into other museum categories, such as museums for peace. While there is no universal definition of a “peace museum”, some common goals associated with sites that define themselves as museums for peace are:

1. To raise awareness about events centered around war or violent conflict,

2. persuade museum visitors that the history and narratives presented about the events are ‘historical truths’, and highlight alternate opinions by sharing facts and stories not commonly heard in the mainstream; and
3. create a space of remembrance for the events, people, and places being memorialized (Tamashiro & Furnari, 2015).

While I believe the May 4 Visitors Center could be categorized as a museum for peace, more research at various sites needs to be conducted before an association can be made between peace museums and all memorial museums.

One question that continually came up as a result of this analysis was: What happens to the May 4 Visitors Center when there is no one alive who actually witnessed or lived through the event? Will the museum lose its power to affect visitors? Will future visitors have deep emotional connections to the event like the participants of this study? Jimi, Daniel, and Judy all mentioned that when they visited Gettysburg it did not have the same feeling as the May 4 site because it didn’t feel as “real” or because they didn’t live through it. Bavidge (2012) describes how time and memory play crucial roles in the effectiveness of a commemorative site, and that she believes some events are just “out of reach” for visitors in regards to feeling any sort of emotional connection (p. 332). However, while my participants stated that Gettysburg did not have a strong effect on them, this does not mean that all visitors will experience Gettysburg in the same way. For example, In Latham’s (2009) numinous experience research, one of her participants, Phil, described a deeply emotional experience upon seeing a picture of a tree taken from the Civil War era, and seeing that same tree in person at Little Round Top in Gettysburg:

it brings history home, it makes history alive, to use commercial-type phrases there, but it brought [?] right here, this happened. I've read about this for years, but I'm standing on the spot where it actually happened. And it's like earthshattering
and I'm seeing evidence that was during the battle is still here (Latham, 2009, p. 84).

This quote is similar to Jimi’s experience upon watching the video in the May 4 Movie Gallery:

Reading something in a book never does an event justice. You know, this...this was— I was there; I was standing on the hill watching it.... Now the exhibit is a whole piece. Had there been no film it would have been like following a timeline. But with the film, it was life and all that stuff that went around—it was all part of it— it was like it was all the film.

Why is it that time plays a role in effecting the visitors experience in some visitors and not others? Perhaps a more detailed investigation into visitors’ experiences to memorial museums commemorating events with no one alive to remember them would provide more insight on the matter.

Another point that deserves further clarification relates to my final theme, the power of *multimodality*. In this case, “multimodality” is referring to not only digital forms of presenting information, but all forms of information, whether it be digital (audio, visual, touch screen interactive) or text, objects, photos, and graphics. The results from this study suggest that the visitor’s experience is enhanced when presented with multiple forms of information in the same exhibit. This discovery is not surprising, as there is already substantial research on immersive experience in other museum settings corroborating these findings. For example, Harvey et al. (1998) conducted a study where he surveyed visitors to the Denver Natural History Museum, where they compared recently renovated exhibits that included multiple forms of presentation (i.e. three dimensional objects, multisensory interaction through touch, smell, and sound, text, photos), to older, more traditional exhibits that did not include as many forms of
presentation within the exhibit. Researchers found that visitors were more likely to have an immersive experience in exhibits that contained multisensory interaction and information presented in multiple formats (Harvey et al., 1998). The results from Harvey et al’s (1998) study, in conjunction with the findings from my study indicate that the inclusion of multiple forms of presenting information into an exhibit space can greatly influence museum visitors overall experience.

Suggestions for future research

There are other areas of research related to the visitor’s experience of memorial museums that should be explored. The most pressing matter, in my opinion, involves gaining a better understanding of how memorial museums can continue to elicit meaningful and emotional experiences. In order to do this, additional qualitative studies need to be conducted on the visitor’s lived experience of memorial museum globally. The research presented in this study illustrates that utilizing phenomenological methods for example, can greatly enhance scholarly understanding of the visitor’s experience and the meanings they make of their visit.

As mentioned previously, another study that would be beneficial is to compare visitor’s lived experiences to a memorial museum that is memorializing events that occurred less than 50 years ago to another memorial museum that is memorializing events that occurred 100+ years ago. This may help to uncover the similarities and differences that arise with time, and to uncover any other underlying reasons as to why visitors to memorial museums experience strong emotional connections to the content.

In addition, exploring how other topics of interest fit within visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums would be beneficial. For example, in this study, some participants
mentioned the idea of desensitization, and how being overexposed to an event or thing and minimize its emotional effect. Judy mentioned that seeing the famous image from the May 4 shootings of the young girl kneeling down and screaming over the body of a slain student is no longer emotionally powerful to her because she has seen it so many times. Also, the importance of first-person accounts is another topic of interest. During Kendall’s visit to the May 4 site, she had the opportunity to speak with a tour guide who was actually on campus when the shootings occurred. Kendall states that having the chance to hear about the event from someone who was “actually there” helped create a more memorable museum experience.

A conclusion of sorts

Overall, the three main goals of this study—learning about visitors’ lived experiences at memorial museums and describing meanings made from these experiences; discovering (if any) experiential themes are present across visitors; and determining if current descriptions of dark tourists match with visitors’ lived experiences in memorial museums from this study—were met by utilizing phenomenological methods to uncover the meaning-making of visitors to the May 4 Visitors Center. The work presented here is only a starting point in exploring visitors’ lived experiences to memorial museums and commemorative sites, and more studies such as the suggestions mentioned in the previous section need to be conducted before a more comprehensive understanding of the experience is reached.

This “conclusion” in all actuality is a call to researchers in hopes of answering more questions about visitors to memorial museums, and the sites themselves. What motivations are behind visits to memorial museums? Do people from other countries experience memorial
museums the same way as people from the United States? What happens to memorial museums as time and memory fade? How can memorial museums remain relevant to future generations? All of these questions have yet to be addressed formally, and addressing them will, in turn, help researchers and those who manage the sites better understand what the visitor wants to experience from their visit, what motivated them to visit, and how to create a space that cultivates and promotes meaningful experiences.
Appendix A
May 4 Visitors Center Exhibit Description
All images taken by Corina Iannaggi

The May 4 Visitors Center consists of three galleries: the Context Gallery, the Movie Gallery, and the Impact and Relevance Gallery. The Context Gallery provides an overview of what was going in the United States during 1970 that led to the events leading up to the May 4 shootings. This section includes three TVs showing compilations of video clips highlighting the generation gap between parents and students, the Civil Rights movement, and the controversy behind the Vietnam War. In addition, the gallery contains a large amount of graphics, photos that coincide with the themes present in the video compilations, and a small collection of artifacts and photos introducing the personal stories of the four students shot and killed during the shootings.
The Movie Gallery tells the story of what happened on Kent State University during the few days leading up to May 4, 1970, and of the events that occurred right after the shootings. The video provides accounts from the students, guards, and professors on site during the events, in addition to the local Kent community in order to present all sides of the story. The movie gallery walls include large time stamped photos of the students and guards before, during, and after the shootings, with labels describing what was happening in the photos.
The Impact and Relevance Gallery illustrates what happened after the shootings took place at Kent State. A large three dimensional wall with headlines from all over the world demonstrate how powerful the May 4 events were. Diverse opinions are shown and captured in the headlines, newspaper clips, and audio clips from various people involved directly in the event, as well as family members of the students who were killed, local and national government representatives, and Civil Rights leaders. At the end of the gallery, visitors are given a chance to reflect on the events surrounding May 4, and asked for their opinion about the impact the May 4 shootings can have for people today and future generations.
Appendix B
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Exploring Visitors’ Lived Experiences in Memorial Museums

Principal Investigator: Kiersten F. Latham, Ph.D (PI) and Corina M. Iannaggi (Co-Investigator)

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose:
The intent of this study is to gain a better understand of visitor's lived experiences in memorial museums in the hopes of discovering the meanings visitor’s take away from their visit.

Procedures
In-depth interviews will be the method of collection data and participants should take at least 45 minutes to complete. However, interviews can last as long as the participant cares to share information

Audio and Video Recording and Photography
The interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. No identifying data about the participant will be shared.

Benefits
This research will not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us to better understand the experiences people have in memorial museum and can help contribute to our overall knowledge of why people visit memorial museums and what makes them important.

Risks and Discomforts
Some of the questions that you will be asked are of a personal nature and may cause you stress or make you feel uncomfortable. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it and go on to the next question. If you experience distress brought on from this study and want to discuss your distress, please contact the University Health Services Psychological Services Department at (330) 672-2487 to schedule an appointment.
Privacy and Confidentiality

No identifying information will be collected. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Corina Iannaggi at 330-348-3930 or Kiersten F. Latham at 330-672-2782. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

__________________________________________
Participant Signature

__________________________________________
Date
Appendix C
Audiotape Consent Form

Name of Study: Exploring Visitors’ Lived Experiences in Memorial Museums
Principal Investigator: Kiersten F. Latham
Co-Investigator: Corina Iannaggi

I agree to participate in an audio-taped interview about my experience at the May 4 Visitors Center as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Corina Iannaggi may audio-tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

________________________________________  ____________________________________
Signature                                      Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to listen to the recording          _____ do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Corina Iannaggi may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project _____ publication _____ presentation at professional meetings

________________________________________  ____________________________________
Signature                                      Date
References


University of Washington, Seattle, WA.
