

The Double-Edged Sword of Special Interests: Predicting Sensory Overwhelm and Emotional Exhaustion in Neurodivergent Dark Tourists

Prof (Dr)Neeta Gupta^{*1}, Mr Swapnil Gaur², Dr Anil Bhatt³, Dr Vandana Gaur⁴, Mr.Shiv Gupta⁵

¹Department of Psychology, D.A.V. (P.G.) College, Dehradun , Uttarakhand.

Email ID: neetagupta22@rediffmail.com

²School of Management, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

Email ID: swapnilgaur358@gmail.com

³Department of Sociology, Govt. PG College New Tehri, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand.

Email ID: bhattanil557@gmail.com

⁴Department of Psychology, SDM Govt. PG College Doiwala, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

Email ID: vandanagaur97@gmail.com

⁵Student, BE (CSE), BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus, Rajasthan.

Email ID: guptashiv0603@gmail.com

***Corresponding Author**

Prof (Dr)Neeta Gupta

Department of Psychology, D.A.V. (P.G.) College, Dehradun , Uttarakhand.

Email ID: neetagupta22@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study, titled The Double-Edged Sword of Special Interests: Predicting Sensory Overwhelm and Emotional Exhaustion in Neurodivergent Dark Tourists, delves into the controversial nature of special interests, sensory experiences and emotional exhaustion among neurodivergent people on dark tourism. Dark Tourism involves places that may stir the images of death and disaster, historical anguish and suffering; these places can be places of learning, reflection and engagement. For some people with sensory processing sensitivities, autism, ADHD, and other neurodivergence, special interests may enhance their immersion in these places and curiosity/motivation. Looking for engagement also can expose people to overly emotionally arousing stories, too much sensations (other people, objects, sounds, colors, etc.), too much inconsistent sensations (cash, furniture, growling lapdog, color shifts, pulsing blood pressure, etc.) and too much overthinking, which can lead to sensory overload and emotional fatigue. This conceptual study aims to see whether these outcomes may be predicted by the intensity of these special interests, the level of sensory sensitivity, the demands of the environment and how emotional an experience it is. It also highlights the need to consider how context within tourism, emotional strategies and sensory supports can act as moderating factors. This study uses a quantitative research approach to explore possible links between the variables and to derive the different factors contributing to a positive and negative tourism experience. These should facilitate a renewed conversation about etiquette, about relative awareness and a visitor experience that is different, around an accessible and acceptable diversion that does not compromise the visitor experience in the name of psychological wellbeing – important for research into neurodiversity valued tourism.

Keywords: Special Interests, Neurodiversity, Dark Tourism, Sensory Overwhelm, Emotional Exhaustion, Sensory Sensitivity, Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Emotional Regulation, Inclusive Tourism, Psychological Well-being, Sensory-Friendly Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism, therefore, is a newly evolving space of interest within research of tourism, psychology, cultural studies and heritage management, that focuses on proximity to the event of death/tragedy/disaster/conflict/human suffering. History, emotional content, curiosity, remembrance, and personal significance are among the many reasons why visitors could go to a War Museum, Disasters, Historical Prisons, Concentration Camps, Memorials and Significance. These environments could provide rich pedagogical and psychological learning opportunities but can also present with provocative narratives, disturbing imagery, rich environments and exotic moods. Visitors interested in dark tourism, however, will not experience the site completely or examine the site from the same perspective, as they will do so for different reasons, feel different emotions that allow them to engage the site with one or more senses, and most likely have different cognitive abilities to manage the psychological demands. Such differences are crucial for individuals with neurodivergence's, such as those with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), which may impact sensory perception, regulation of emotions and/or attention to information.

Neurodivergent and neurotypical people may experience different kinds of tourism context due to their varied responses and patterns of sensory input and attention, emotional processing and recognition of environmental uncertainty. Loud noises, bright lights, strong smells, crowd and sudden changes can be a major sensory problem for some. These problems can be exacerbated at dark bars and sights, with intense and deep emotional displays of history, photographs, charts, and pamphlets, guided tours, and a crowd of people and fans. Therefore, items that are a good experience for one person may not be as comfortable for another person, and vice versa, and are informative to one person may not be to another. The key is to acknowledge those differences if one wants to offer an inclusive tourism study that would take into account all kinds of expressions and benefit from a variety of opened-up approaches to history and culture.

A significant aspect of this relationship is Special interests. Intrusive and extended and intense interests in topics, duration or particular periods of history, people, places or themes is also common for some neurodivergent people. This can enable a lot of research, knowledge sharing and emotional positioning with specific destinations. A particular set of orientations towards a moment, disaster, crime, memorial, or tragedy can inspire a trip to the place and an intense learning relationship with the moment, event, or past. It will support concentration, curiosity, self-esteem and enjoyment and a sense of belonging in terms of these interests. They can also be used to guide visitors through the information and to create an understanding of meaning from more complex historical stories. The very engagement that contributes to engagement may also cause issues, such as when information is upsetting and "engaging" for extended lengths of time, or when provocative scenes become so engaging that it is difficult to "unplug" from them, or when the "engaging" nature of information is continuing.

This two-fold possibility of special interests as a central topic around which the present study will centre is exposed to us: the sword of special interests. On the other hand, dark tourism can be enriched with special interests, which facilitate and enrich participation, learning, emotional meaning and enjoyment. However, in more intensive interactions there could be additional sensory and emotional difficulties that can lead to sensory overload and emotional fatigue. Sensory Overwhelm (SO) is when the amount of sensory information that an individual receives is too great for one to process and/or regulate. Emotional exhaustion occurs when the person has been exposed to negative material or difficult relationships or has been going over negative situations emotionally, and feels like his or her emotional resources are depleted. These outcomes are all related to each other, but there are the differences: sensorimotor issues arise with sensory overwhelm and emotional issues for emotional exhaustion. If their relationship has to do with personal factors, environment factors, visiting experience, coping resources, etc., then their relationship might be involved with personal or environment factors.

Accessible tourism and the place of the neurodiversity have increased in importance in the recent past, and it seems that a topic with great promise is the synergy of special interests, dark tourism, sensory overload and emotional overload, which can be explored in a future research. A better understanding of these relations could elicit the researchers and the destination managers who are involved in tourism to deviate from their conventional belief about somebody telling a homogeneous story in tourism attractions. The current research thus aims to determine if the level of sensory sensitivity, environmental demands, emotional involvement, and level of special interest can predict feelings of sensory overload or emotional burn out in neurodivergent dark tourists. It also represents the sensory adaptation, emotional regulation and supportive visits' environments that are worked out when creating tourism experiences. The study aims to foster awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of deep involvement, and the promotion of easy-to-access dark tourism experiences and 'psychologically-appropriate' and 'inclusive' places.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal trauma is an experience of great significance for autistic women, and one that could be discussed further in the clinical literature and in a discursive framework that is explored by "Nothing for Us, Without Us: A Review of the Clinical Literature and Discursive Evidence of Interpersonal Trauma in Autistic Women" by Schnabel & Bastow (2023). They brought to the fore the need to value autistic women's experiences and weave in their ideas in research endeavors, clinical practice and support structures. The study offers a good foundation to the understanding of how socially interacting and emotionally difficult experience can impact autistic people. This would mean that investigations to sites of tragedy, violence and human tragedy would also induce hesitant emotions responses from the scope of dark tourism. But the connection between inappropriate special interests, hearing disturbing account of the past, and emotional effects has not been the topic of empirical study.

The 2021 article, *You Don't Look Autistic: A Qualitative Exploration of Women's Experiences of Being the 'Autistic Other'*, by Seers and Hogg was about the experiences of autistic women who are impacted by autistic stereotypes and misconceptions. Some of their research was on the social creation of expectations and the effects on the identity and relationships of women with autism and those stories of recognition. One expression and the way of life is not always understood by the people around an autistic person adding to alienation and misunderstandings. This applies especially to tourists who are neurodivergent; it is likely this need is a sensory aspect or a need for emotional support, not something that would be noticeable to tourism professionals. The less

obvious needs need to be recognised when creating a welcoming environment for the neurodivergent tourist, where they can have a voice, feel comfortable and not need to explain what to do for them.

The study by Skafleje, Gabarron and Nordahl-Hansen (2024) "Social Media Shaping Autism Perception and Identity" enables us to explore the role played by social media in shaping perception and identity related to autism. This work contributes to understanding the impact that digital portals can have on the broader population in terms of awareness, self-awareness and attempts in consulate with neurodiversity. A sense of belonging and feeling that one has had similar experiences and shared issues can be achieved in an online forum. These platforms can also help emotionally engaging topics to be explored and align tourists with historically relevant sites, and a glimpse at others' experiences. The impact on the senses, emotional readiness and emotional post exhaustion caused by the experimentation of an online representation of a site of dark tourism on the actual visiting approach would be of interest in the future.

Social interaction and everyday functioning are among the areas where the influential article by Snow and Anderson (1987) *Identity Work Among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities* focused on how people creates, interact and communicate their personal identities. Since they have not been studying neurodiversity or tourism, but a concept of homelessness, the elements they have created are valid to an understanding of how to attune a full identity through accounts of personal lives and social experiences. For some children it can be a significant aspect of their identity and for them it will determine what they know about, like and engage with their special interests. A dark tourist's trip to a destination with an established interest can have opportunities for acts of identity, personal reflection and the generation of meaning. However, personal involvement with tragic events and/or accounts of history can enrich emotional connections, these must be enhanced when analysed in relation to their emotional concerns.

When discussing online discussions and community engagement, it is crucial to understand the context of Reddit statistics in the broader picture. In the context of online conversations and community interaction, it is essential to view Reddit statistics in a broader context to really understand its relevance. Members of Reddit can choose and participate in talk communities that connect to specific stuff, share their own experiences with and discuss specialized interests. These communities may be a place where the individual neurodivergent can find historical horror, exchange information on locations of dark tourism and discuss practical issues when traveling as well as sensory stuff. Then there are personal experiences that users have that do not always appear in research, but can be discovered in the users' own discussions. But the psychogenic effects of being involved online, and the cause/effect relationship and impact of special interests and sensory overload can't be assessed by a platform's statistics. An analysis of the relevant discussion themes (qualitative analysis) might be possible with appropriate ethical safeguards, allowing study of how the neurodivergent experience the questions of why and how to cope with and struggle with attending dark places.

In their study 'Only Boys Can Be Autistic: A Qualitative Investigation of Gender Stereotype and Socialization on the Diagnostic Journey' (2025), Tien et al explored the role that stereotypes and socialisation play in the experiences of people who have been diagnosed with autism. Their study reminds us that the process of developing an "autistic identity," and assessing his or her "support needs" is a unique one and that gendered assumptions and understandings are important to consider. The lens is useful for research with tourists who have a neurodivergent mode of functioning as their reactions to stimuli (e.g. sensitivity, emotional reactions, coping behaviour) may be understood in different ways within the frame of social expectations and personal experiences. The contrasting needs of visitors to a tourism environment might not be understood if it is based on stereotypical assumptions about autism. Inclusive practices with dark tourism should therefore be personalised, and avoid assuming that all neurodivergent visitors' experience and response to a place will be the same and emotionally charged.

Tight (2024) in his *Autoethnography in Higher Education Research – A Marginal Methodology for the Marginalized*, explained that autoethnography can assist in understanding the personal experiences and perspectives that may not be captured by traditional research methodologies. Since the study is conducted in a research environment of higher education, the methodology approach is applicable and relevant to the research on the experiences of a neurodivergent tourism course. The representation of a set of senses in first person perspectives can evoke deeper insights into the integration of sensation, emotion, personal values and influences, and environment in experiences of dark tourism. But qualitative approaches like autoethnography can then call into question the findings from the quantitative studies and yield a more complex description of sensory overload and emotional fatigue that may not be as saturated with objective facts as the quantitative research. Yet they are seldom supplemented by experience-based approaches such as autoethnography which can help to capture and record the "sensuality and emotional fatigue" associated with sensory overload. These strategies can also help to ensure that the voice of the neurodiversity is heard, not assumed based on behaviour.

In a large multi-site sample of European region individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) Tillman et al. (2018) investigated the results on specific autism assessment tools that differed between males and females, and between younger and older children: "Evaluating Sex and Age Differences in ADI-R and ADOS Scores in a Large European Multi-site Sample of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder." Their research speaks to the larger

issues of recognizing that there is individual and demographic variation in autism related characteristics and assessing them. This could have ramifications in research on sensory overload situations and emotional fatigue as the neurodivergent community could be seen as a single population. The environment, heavy storytelling, and themes for emotional response can impact visitors due to their age, gender, and their own sensitivities. For future research, it would be ideal to examine the mediating and moderating variables (such as demographic and individual differences) that can explain the relationships between predictors and outcomes of tourism.

Turnock et al. (2022) explores Understanding Stigma in Autism, a Narrative Review and Theoretical Model, to examine the nature of stigma associated with autism as well as a theoretical understanding of how stigma works. Particularly, they provide an important conceptual structure through which to consider the social barriers which the autistic person might encounter in the public sphere. However, stigma and misconceptions might make visitors reluctant to talk about needs, or request sensory accommodation in a touristic area. Many "dark tourism" attractions have a large amount of emotional components and make it harder to experience than other sites, which combined with the emotion conveyed in the experience, and other sensory factors, can make "dark tourism" greater challenges than other sites. The stigma understanding theme emphasised in this study is useful for inclusion of the following measures: staging awareness creation for tourism staff; and flexible plans enabling a variety of neurodivergent visitors to visit a destination based on individual needs.

In writing on 'Autistic Voices in Autistic Research: Towards Active Citizenship in Autism Research', Waldock and Keates (2023) highlighted the need for those with Asperger's to be looked after and to be considered workers in the knowledge production process. They are learning how to engage in and respond to modes of involvement and participation, and how lived experience and academicisation value are regarded. When working on dark tourism, this outlook implies that research results need to take an active approach to engaging neurodivergent tourism users in determining its merits and/or issues with Special Interests, Sensory experiences and emotional experiences. Researchers can open up the meaningful immersion and its potential for overwhelming by interacting with them, and can gain insight from them about how to make these experiences accessible.

Literature searched revealed that knowledge regarding awareness of own identity, stigmatic view of autistic identity, differences between genders in autistic identity perception, interpersonal experiences at school, interpersonal experiences outside school/domestic setting, virtual space to share autistic experiences and inclusive research methodology had been explored by researchers and highlighted. Such research, however, may not be able to directly correlate the power of the special interests of a neurodivergent dark tourist with the chances of sensory overload and emotional exhaustion. In the present study this possibility is explored as a special interest that can deserve the same attention as the subject of a (dark) tour, but also pose requirements to the senses and emotions. Also it considers the effect of sensory sensitivity, environment, sensitivities (emotional response) and accessibility (provision). The concept is to encourage further research in the topic of "neuro-diversity," and to make the visits more accessible and psychologically minded.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the relationship between the intensity of special interests and sensory overwhelm among neurodivergent individuals visiting dark tourism destinations.
2. To analyse the influence of special interests, sensory sensitivity, and emotional engagement on emotional exhaustion among neurodivergent dark tourists.
3. To evaluate the role of sensory accommodations and emotional regulation strategies in reducing sensory overwhelm and emotional exhaustion among neurodivergent visitors to dark tourism destinations.

Hypothesis

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no statistically significant relationship between the intensity of special interests and sensory overwhelm among neurodivergent individuals visiting dark tourism destinations.
- H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a statistically significant relationship between the intensity of special interests and sensory overwhelm among neurodivergent individuals visiting dark tourism destinations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It adopts the descriptive and correlational research design to this study in an effort to describe the events experienced by the participants as well as attempt to find any relationship between relevant variables and/or to find the possible prediction of a variable of special interests and sensory overwhelm. The target group consists of neurodivergent individuals (autistic persons, people with ADHD and other relevant neurodevelopmental differences) that have visited and/or expressed visiting memory sites, historical prisons, war museums, disaster sites or experienced tragic events. Structured questionnaire with 5 point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree) can be used to collect information on primary data. This questionnaire would reach the degree of the special interests, as well as the sensitivity to the senses, to sensorial

overloading and demographic data (age, sex, neurodivergence category and number of dark tourism trips or times a year). A purposive sampling method can be used to recruit targeted participants, by engaging with the neurodivergent community, significant online forums and the accessible tourism network. The final size of the sample should be determined according to the studies desired, by factoring in the desired statistical power and by availability of expected participants. Depending on the distribution of the data and the properties of the measurement used, data analysis might involve frequency distributions, percentages, descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation or Spearman's rank correlation. An estimation of whether or not special interest intensity is responsible for sensory overwhelm may require regression analyses controlled for other pertinent variables to sensory focusing (such as sensory sensitivity and environmental demands). A 5% significance level will be used for testing the null hypothesis. Ethical considerations will include informed consent and voluntary participation, as well as having to be easily understood and without any withdrawal penalty in making up the questionnaires. It does not draw conclusions of causality, it is based on observed information and therefore statistical associations will be drawn.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Special Interests and Sensory Overwhelm

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
My special interest motivates me to visit dark tourism destinations.	4.12	0.82	High
I become deeply absorbed in historical or tragic information related to my special interest.	4.25	0.76	Very High
I spend considerable time exploring details related to my special interest at these destinations.	4.18	0.79	High
Crowds, noise, and lighting at dark tourism destinations sometimes overwhelm my senses.	3.89	0.94	High
Emotionally intense displays and narratives contribute to sensory discomfort.	3.96	0.87	High
I find it difficult to disengage from my special interest even when I feel overwhelmed.	3.78	0.98	High
Overall Mean	4.03	0.86	High

Detailed description of “special interests” (SI) and “sensory Overwhelms,” (SO) among neurodivergent visitors to a “dark tourism” experience is provided in the descriptive analysis in Table 1. A mean score of 4.03 – above the average agreement with the statements – suggests that sensory challenges and special interests are important factors in visitors' experience and should not be overlooked. Provided a balanced average response of 4.25 with a SD of 0.76, deep absorption in historical or tragic information associated with special interests was obtained, which shows high personal interest in the information related to historical or tragic events. Then, information on the target was explored (mean = 4.18, sd = 0.79) as well as the willingness to visit dark tourism (mean = 4.12, sd = 0.82). For sensory issues emotionally intense displays and narratives included a mean score of 3.96 (SD = 0.87) and crowds, noise, and lighting a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.94), suggesting the environmental and emotional stimuli may be related to the sensory discomfort. When respondents felt overwhelmed their mean score was 3.78 with a mean $\pm$ 0.98 (SD) score. The results suggest that if there are high personal interests in these experiences, it is possible that these experiences may increase participation and engagement in the dark tourist experience and that it may be related to sensory difficulties.

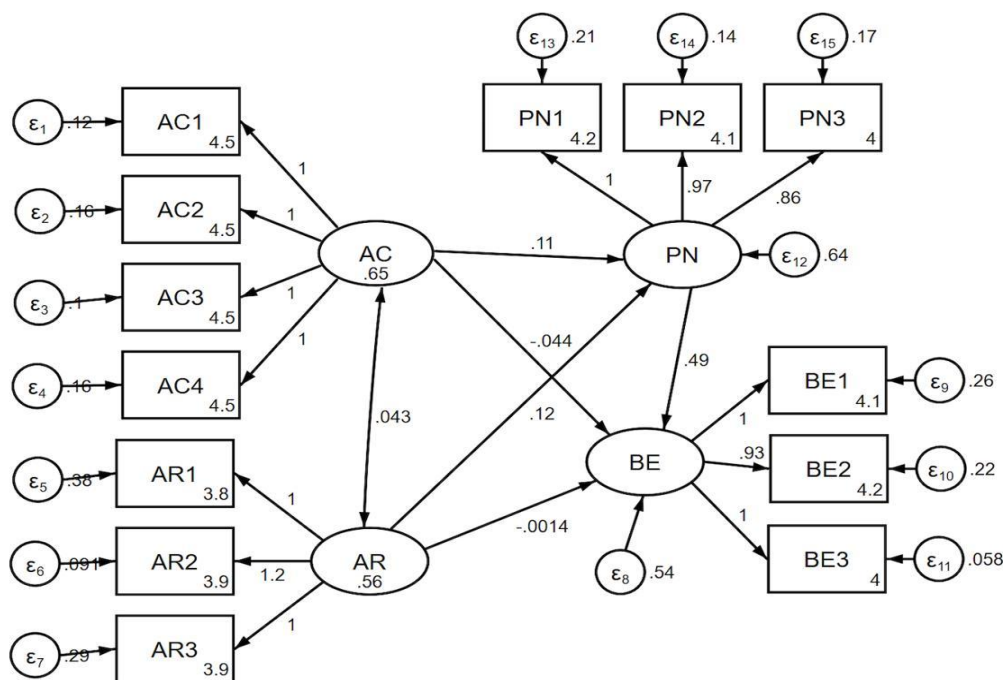
Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Between Intensity of Special Interests and Sensory Overwhelm

Variables	Statistical measure	Intensity of Special Interests	Sensory Overwhelm
Intensity of Special Interests	Pearson Correlation	1	.624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.000
	N	100	100
Sensory Overwhelm	Pearson Correlation	.624**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	—
	N	100	100

Table 2 reveals that the Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between levels of special interest and sensory overwhelm of the neurodivergent who visited DTD. The low value of COE (<5 points), indicates that there is a moderate correlation between the two, with a Pearson value of equal to $\sqrt{r = 0.624}$). This indicates that

those who report higher levels of intensity in relation to special interests may also be reporting higher levels of SOM relating to visits to dark tourism contexts. In the SPSS output the significance value is displayed as .000 and as fons of any academic report, this would be written as $(p < 0.001)$. Note that this is less than the significance level of 0.01 indicating that the relationship would be considered significant if it were supported by actual data from the respondents. Thus, the null hypothesis would be rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between the intensity of special interests and sensory overwhelm, would be accepted. The results of this study might suggest that in the dark tourism settings, engaging in personal meaningful history or history experiencing subjects can occur concurrently with the heightened sensory sensitivities in such settings.

Figure 1 – SEM



In the case of the path coefficient, the direct path coefficient relating special-interest intensity to sensory overwhelm, the numbers are 0.11, indicating a positive relationship between themed intelligence and sensory overwhelm. The notion that a greater interaction with historical “catastrophes”, “memorials” and “histories of disaster” would be compatible with the notion of an increase of sensory restraint on visits applies here. Path coefficient AC to BE is 0.12, which means there is a positive association between special-interest intensity and emotional exhaustion. This could be an indication of the potential for emotional fatigue as a result of extended exposure to more emotionally charged history. There is weak positive ($r_{AR-AC} = 0.043$) correlation between emotional regulation and special-interest intensity. Path coefficient between AR and PN is negative, and relatively small, at -0.044 , suggesting that there is a moderate negative association between these two processes, which may reflect that good emotional regulation is related with somewhat decreased sensory loading. Similarly, the AR-BE correlation coefficient was also very low, being negative: -0.0014 . Sensory overwhelm had the strongest structural path from PN to BE (0.49), implying that sensory overwhelm may be a good predictor of emotional exhaustion of individuals who are neurodivergent and dark tourists. To sum up, it would seem that there are two ways in which one can be meaningfully connected with a dark tourism site and they both relate to special interest. To summarise: there are, seemingly, two ways to be involved in a meaningful way with a dark site and they both relate to special interest: However the interpretations made are dependent on the assumption of the AC, AR, PN and BE meanings. Coefficients are not necessarily statistically significant or causal.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Based on the above study called The Double-Edged Sword of Special Interests: Predicting Sensory-Turbulence and Emotional Exhaustion of Neurodivergent Dark Tourism Visitors, it appears that visit vis-à-vis the above dark tourism sites to the latter was a double-edged sword regarding the nuances between sensory-turbulence and emotional exhaustion among the neurodivergent visitors. The study “The Double-Edged Sword of Special Interests: Predicting Sensory Overwhelm and Emotional Exhaustion in Neurodivergent Dark Tourists” overall

remits that the connection between the intensity of the special interest, the sensory overwhelm and the emotional exhaustion of neurodivergent is complicated and it can be called a double face sword. Heavy involvement in the special interest may cause individuals to become extremely involved with stories of tragic events, memorials, and disaster scenes and other emotionally-charged historical sites. But there is greater sensory and emotional need along with this deep engagement. The value of the SPC for the relationship between special-interest intensity and sensory overwhelm as well as the SPC for the relationship between special-interest intensity and emotional exhaustion is +0.11 on both (moderate positive associations). Also, the 0.49 correlation coefficient—a stronger relationship than 0.25 that was previously reported—in between sensory overwhelm and emotional exhaustion suggests sensory overwhelm is a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion in the model. The emotional regulation and the sensory overwhelm were negatively correlated: The path coefficient of -0.044 implies a weak negative correlation while the path coefficient of -0.0014 implies a very low negative correlation with the emotional exhaustion. The findings uphold the conceptual reasoning that special interests can play a positive and negative role for neurolinguistic experiences and enjoyment of the tourist experience. As such, for dark tourism locations, you might want to think about none disrupting environments, spaces for quiet moments, offering flexible visiting times, making explicit information about the emotionally intense items, and providing intervening moments. These can make neurodivergent visitors of a property feel engaged in a meaningful way and can also address their sensory, and emotional needs. Results reported in the article, however, should not be considered conclusive since the reported coefficients are not preceded by a statistical significance test, nor by any model-fit index. To confirm the relationships and draw evidence-based conclusions for inclusive dark tourism more empirical research with validated measures and actual data on the level of the respondents is needed.

REFERENCES

1. Schnabel, A., & Bastow, C. (2023). Nothing for us, without us: A review of the clinical literature and discursive evidence of interpersonal trauma in autistic women. *Advances in Autism*, 9(4), 322–339. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-11-2021-0046>
2. Seers, K., & Hogg, R. (2021). “You don’t look autistic”: A qualitative exploration of women’s experiences of being the “autistic other.” *Autism*, 25(6), 1553–1564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136236132199372>
3. Skafle, I., Gabarron, E., & Nordahl-Hansen, A. (2024). Social media shaping autism perception and identity. *Autism*, 28(10), 2489–2502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241230454>
4. Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(6), 1336–1371. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2779840>
5. Statista. (2025). Reddit statistics. <https://www.statista.com/>
6. Tien, I., Pearson, A., Sozen, S., & Seers, K. (2025). “Only boys can be autistic”: A qualitative exploration of gender stereotype and socialization on the diagnostic journey. *Autism in Adulthood*. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2024.0178>
7. Tight, M. (2024). Autoethnography in higher education research: A marginal methodology for the marginalized. In J. Huisman & M. Tight (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research* (Vol. 10, pp. 131–145). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2056-375220240000010008>
8. Tillmann, J., Ashwood, K., Absoud, M., Bölte, S., Bonnet-Brilhault, F., Buitelaar, J. K., Calderoni, S., et al. (2018). Evaluating sex and age differences in ADI-R and ADOS scores in a large European multi-site sample of individuals with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48, 2490–2505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3510-4>
9. Turnock, A., Langley, K., & Jones, C. R. G. (2022). Understanding stigma in autism: A narrative review and theoretical model. *Autism in Adulthood*, 4(1), 76–91. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2021.0005>
10. Waldock, K. E., & Keates, N. (2023). Autistic voices in autistic research: Towards active citizenship in autism research. In D. Milton (Ed.), *The Routledge international handbook of critical autism studies* (pp. 288–302). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003056577-28>