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Exploring the Restorative Benefits of Spiritual Retreats: The Case of Clergy Retreats in Australia

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Abstract

Despite being one of the oldest forms of tourism, religious tourism is a growing and increasingly diverse sector. Spiritual retreat tourism is one type of religious tourism that has been found to have a range of benefits for participants, particularly in relation to restorative benefits such as rest and recovery of cognitive capacity. This mixed-methods study applies Attention Restoration Theory to explore the ways in which participants of spiritual retreats attain restorative outcomes, and to investigate whether different types of retreats result in different benefits. The analysis of data from 152 clergy who participated in spiritual retreats in Australia demonstrated that restoration was a key outcome, amongst other benefits. The practical implications of the findings for both organisers and attendees of spiritual retreats are discussed, and a research agenda for future exploration of the value of retreats is proposed.

Key words: religious tourism; spiritual retreats; attention restoration theory; restorative benefits; reflection

Introduction

Spiritual retreats offered within Christian, Buddhist and secular contexts have been found to provide opportunities for reflection (Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014), renewal (Chun & Chong, 2011), restoration (Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005), personal development (Schutte & Dreyer, 2006), transformation (Voigt et al., 2011) and healing (Nelson-Johnson, 2015). Research attention is increasing into Buddhist and secular retreats, yet there is minimal investigation and evaluation of Christian spiritual retreats, despite their frequent occurrence. As restorative experiences have been found significant in religious tourism research in Christian contexts (Bond, Packer & Ballantyne, 2015; Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005; Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014), this article applies Attention Restoration Theory to explore the restorative outcomes of spiritual retreats for Christian clergy in Australia.

Literature Review

Religious tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism (Rinschede, 1992) and represents a significant, evolving, growing and increasingly diverse sector of the global tourism market (Sharpley, 2009). Common examples of religious travel and tourism noted by Stausberg (2011) include retreats, seminars, conferences, festivals and pilgrimages. According to McKercher's (2016) taxonomy of tourism products, religious tourism is situated within the Personal Quest category, which refers to travel for personal reasons associated with self-development and/or learning, and includes pilgrimage, sacred travel, missionary safaris and spiritual retreats. An estimated 300 million travellers, engaging in both traditional and modern experiences of religion and spirituality,

contribute to the \$18-billion religious tourism industry (Wright, 2008). According to Raj, Griffin & Blackwell (2015, p.105) religious tourism includes “a range of spiritual sites and associated services, which are visited for both secular and religious reasons”. A review of religious tourism literature provided by Timothy and Olsen (2006) demonstrates the diversity of the industry with case studies from the perspectives of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, as well as more recent new-age spirituality movements.

Recently, the term “spiritual tourism” has gained increased use in both academic and non-academic settings. Stausberg (2014, p.356) explains: “Spiritual tourism can be used as a synonym for religious tourism but alternatively it can be used as a specific form of religious tourism, one that is more individual, more prone to connectedness, personal meaning and quest, or it can refer to a travel process of identity-work, voyages in search of meaningful experiences, not articulated in religious language”. Norman (2012) identified five types of spiritual tourism experiences, namely spiritual tourism as healing; quest; retreat; collective and experiment. These types align with McKercher’s (2016) Personal Quest category, as illustrated in Table 1. Within Norman’s (2012) classification, spiritual tourism as healing refers to both physical and psychological healing, with wellness activities often being practiced in an attempt to repair or maintain self. Spiritual tourism as quest refers to tourists seeking new knowledge or fresh discovery of self. Spiritual tourism as retreat (Norman, 2012) is characterised by renewal or an escape from the everyday routine. Spiritual tourism as collective (Norman, 2012) recognizes that some experiences are more significant because they are encountered with others and not merely as an individual. Spiritual tourism as experiment (Norman, 2012) refers to tourists seeking alternatives as a substitute for something that has become unsustainable or unhelpful in their normal lifestyle and existence, for instance travelling to India to backpack or attend a yoga course. According to Raj & Griffin (2015), the notion of spiritual tourists refers to contemporary ‘wayfarers’ who are not driven by religious motives but a more general spiritual search for meaning, outside of the confines of dogma and traditional religion.

Clearly, there is an overlap between religious, spiritual and wellness tourism (McGettigan & Voronkova, 2016), and research into spiritual retreats might be positioned within religious tourism (McKercher, 2016), spiritual tourism (Norman, 2012), wellness tourism (Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011) or transformational tourism (Fu, Tanyatanaboon & Lehto, 2015; Heintzman, 2013). As this paper focusses on Christian clergy retreats in Australia, it is positioned within the religious tourism field.

Shackley (2004) suggests that most retreat centres in the developed world are either Buddhist or Christian. There has been some research into Buddhist and meditation retreats (e.g., Carter, Prest, Callistemon, Ungerer, Liu & Pettigrew, 2005; Emavardhana & Tori, 1997; Walach, Buchheld, Bittenuller, Kleinknecht & Schmidt, 2006), with a particular focus on Temple Stay, which is a form of religious tourism whereby Buddhist monasteries provide accommodation as well as cultural, spiritual, religious and leisure activities to tourists (Chun, Roh & Spralls, 2017). The motivations for participating in Temple Stays include experiencing tranquillity, mental relaxation and reduced stress (Choe, Blazey & Mitas, 2015) as well as being with nature, learning and self-growth (Chun, Roh & Spralls, 2017). Participants reported inner healing and renewal resulting from the silence, meditation and self-reflection while at Temple Stays (Chun & Chong, 2011). From ancient times, Christian retreats have been associated with the notion of ‘desert spirituality’ - a way to draw closer to God in silence and solitude by leaving behind concerns from everyday life (Tullio & Rossiter, 2009).

Research into spiritual retreats has also been undertaken within an orthodox Christian context at a Benedictine monastery in Canada (Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005), a Catholic monastery in New Zealand (Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014), a sacred shrine on Mt Athos, Greece (Andriotis, 2009) as well as Roman Catholic weekend retreats (Nelson-Johnson, 2015). These weekend retreats were found to be transformative, healing, revitalizing and calming due to the sense of community, being outside one's normal environment and the hospitality provided. Trono (2015, p.19) also note that spiritual retreats can be offered in a secular retreat (non-religious) context, for "those who seek a holiday of the soul that meets the need for growth of the person, spirituality and creativity".

In practice, spiritual retreats take numerous forms and are marketed in a variety of ways. A retreat involves leaving the everyday routine and structure behind so as to enter into a new temporary experience that includes separation from everyday life and a fresh experience of some form of community in the new environment (Schutte & Dreyer, 2006). The word 'retreat' incorporates notions of escape, relaxation, renewal, refreshment, rejuvenation, stillness, solitude, rest, recharging physical/mental batteries, reflection, finding self, and exploring new possibilities upon return to ordinary life (Tullio & Rossiter, 2009; Huszar, 2016). Retreats can provide opportunities for healing, companionship, personal transformation, receiving increased strength to live out one's vocation, and becoming more experientially aware of the divine (Schutte & Dreyer, 2006). While outcomes of attending a spiritual retreat include restoration (Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005), spiritual transformation and wellbeing (Andriotis, 2009; Heintzman, 2013; Klimova, 2011), and eudemonic experiences (Voigt et al., 2010), this research will focus on restorative outcomes, specifically in the context of Christian clergy retreats.

Restoration and religious tourism experiences

Previous research has shown that places of worship and monasteries have the potential to restore participants' ability to focus attention and reflect (Herzog, Grey, Dunville, Hicks & Gilson, 2011; Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005). In studying the restorative experiences of 521 visitors to a Benedictine monastery, Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan (2005) found visitor outcomes included satisfaction, feeling relaxed, positive, rested and clear-headed and that the destination itself often afforded personal transformation. Similarly, visitors to a Catholic monastery in New Zealand noted reflection and personal growth as valuable experiences (Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014) while spiritual retreat visitors in the study by Voigt et al. (2010) appreciated feelings of renewal, peace and calm as well as the opportunity for contemplation and meditation. In a study of visitor experiences at three Christian pilgrimage sites in England, Bond, Packer and Ballantyne (2015) found that restorative experiences were more important to participants than the spiritual or cognitive benefits often associated with religious tourism experiences.

Sharpley (2009) suggested that further research into the experiential aspects of religious tourism is needed to "inform the management, development and promotion of religious/sacred tourism sites and experiences" (p.241). Similarly, more targeted research is needed in order to develop, manage and promote effective retreat practices. This paper addresses this need by applying Attention Restoration Theory (ART) to explore the restorative benefits of different types of spiritual retreats and better understand the processes that lead to restorative outcomes. This theoretical framework will be used to shape the research questions and interpret the research findings.

Attention Restoration Theory (ART)

Attention Restoration Theory (ART) was developed by Stephen Kaplan and Rachel Kaplan (1989) within the field of environmental psychology and attempts to explain the process by which physical, psychological and social capabilities can be replenished or renewed. The theory maintains that the capacity to focus attention and inhibit distractions becomes fatigued with overuse. In order to recover from mental fatigue, the individual's attention needs to be effortlessly, rather than intentionally, engaged. When effort is not required to inhibit distractions, the capacity for directed attention is able to recover (Kaplan, 1995). Environments that effortlessly engage attention are referred to as restorative environments. The theory has been widely used to study restorative benefits and experiences in contexts such as natural environments (Berto, 2005; Herzog, Maguire & Nebel, 2003; Laumann, Garling & Stormark, 2001), museums (Packer & Bond, 2010), zoos (Pals, Steg, Siero & van der Zee, 2009), monasteries (Ouellette et al., 2005), houses of worship (Herzog, Ouellette, Rolens & Koenigs, 2010), favourite places (Korpela & Hartig, 1996), vacations (Lehto, 2013) and workplaces (Kaplan, 1993).

According to ART, there are four characteristics of a restorative environment (Kaplan, 1995): (1) being away (a physical or psychological break from routine); (2) extent (an environment with sufficient size and scope to occupy the mind without calling upon directed attention); (3) fascination (an environment that holds attention without any effort); and (4) compatibility (alignment between a person's goals and what the setting provides). Natural environments are purported to be the most restorative as they contain all four characteristics in abundance (Berto, 2005; Herzog, Black, Fountaine & Knotts, 1997; Kaplan, 2001).

Four benefits gained from exposure to restorative environments (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) have been identified and were later grouped into two categories of 'attention recovery' and 'reflection'. Attention recovery includes clearing the mind and recovering directed attention; reflection includes considering immediate and unresolved personal problems, as well as reflecting on priorities and one's position in the world (Herzog, Black, Fountaine & Knotts, 1997). Clearly, having the capacity to focus attention is necessary in order to function effectively (Kaplan, 1995). Thus spending time in restorative environments to replenish attention faculties is a valuable endeavour for anyone struggling with mental fatigue.

Attention Restoration Theory has previously been applied to examine the causes and consequences of mental fatigue in clergy and offer practical interventions to restore cognitive wellbeing, with spiritual retreats being one suggestion (author's publication, 2017). However, the theory has not been previously used to study the extent to which different types of spiritual retreats are actually able to achieve restorative outcomes. This is the focus of the present research.

Clergy Context

The clergy face a unique working environment (Blaikie, 1979) and are particularly susceptible to mental fatigue. They are expected to fulfil multiple professional roles such as preacher, ritualist, pastor, teacher and administrator (Carroll, 2006), as well as handle conflict, allocate resources and disseminate information (Kuhne & Donaldson, 1995). Clergy provide organizational leadership, manage volunteers and staff and are required to respond appropriately to the constant demands of congregational members, church hierarchies and the wider community (Rowatt, 2001; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2015; Davey, 1996). The many and varied stressors associated with the clergy role have been categorised as work-related stressors and boundary-related stressors (Wells et al., 2012).

Work-related stressors include multiplicity of roles, role conflict, unrealistic time expectations, low pay and interpersonal criticism. Boundary-related stressors impact on the clergy's family life and include lack of time for family due to the constant work demands; isolation due to a lack of support and close relationships that often lead to a clergy's own needs going unaddressed; and the challenges of fitting in with a congregation and managing difficult personalities (Hill, Darling & Raimondi, 2003). Such stressors can not only increase clergy's mental fatigue but also limit their opportunities for mental recovery and restoration (author's publication, 2017). The consequences of directed attention fatigue include inappropriate responses to situations, a greater likelihood of making errors, feeling irritable, being easily distracted and unable to focus attention, as well as being unable to solve problems (Staats, Kieviet & Hartig, 2003). In a major study of Australian Christian clergy, Blaikie (1979) concluded that research was needed in order to propose potential strategies to resolve the issues and stressors associated with the clergy profession. In this article we explore the role of spiritual retreats in providing restorative experiences that support clergy wellbeing and assist them to effectively live out their vocation.

It is common for denominational hierarchies across various Christian religious institutions to provide an opportunity for clergy to experience refreshment and renewal in the form of an annual retreat away from the normal work environment within work time. Clergy Renewal Programs in America "provide an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the persistent obligations of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. Renewal periods are not vacations but times for intentional exploration and reflection" (Clergy Renewal Program, 2017). Spiritual enrichment retreats have been identified as a potential opportunity to provide support to clergy and their families (Darling, Hill & McWey, 2004), and are valued by clergy and their spouses as a component of holistic health programming to enhance their wellbeing (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2012). Some retreats emphasise reflective experiences and are designed to provide "interior spiritual development through a prolonged period of reflection" (Catholic Retreats, n.d.). Others emphasise educational experiences and are designed to impart information and facilitate discussion amongst attendees, away from the normal place of work and in an environment conducive to learning new things (Rice, 2014). Although clergy health programs in America are often retreat-based, there has been minimal evaluation of the outcomes of such experiences (Wallace et al., 2012). Empirical research is required to explore the effectiveness and restorative benefits of the various retreat experiences offered by religious organisations.

Aims and focus of this study

This study presents a first attempt to investigate the restorative potential of spiritual retreat experiences, in the context of clergy retreats in Australia. The research aims to explore the extent to which different types of spiritual retreats (reflective and educational) contribute to restorative outcomes for participants, and compare the types of benefits gained from a retreat experience. Specifically, this article will address the following research questions:

- 1) Does a spiritual retreat have a measurable and durable impact on participants' recovery from mental fatigue?
- 2) Do different types of retreat elicit different restorative outcomes and benefits?
- 3) How do participants perceive the impact of the retreat on their mental state?
- 4) How do participants perceive the unfolding of the restorative process during the retreat?

The research findings will enable retreat facilitators to more effectively manage, develop and promote appropriate experiences. Research in this field could also benefit other professions that are considering the provision of annual retreats for their employees.

Method

This research is situated within a post-positivist paradigm, which recognizes that all research methods are flawed and that it is impossible to provide an objective account of reality as data is already being interpreted at the same time that it is being observed (Mottier, 2005). Thus in order to produce stronger inferences and increase diversity of findings, inquiry was undertaken using quantitative methods coupled with qualitative approaches (Guba, 1990). This mixed methods approach was considered important to most effectively address the research problem (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) as it enabled the ART quantitative findings to be more fully understood alongside qualitative insights describing how restorative benefits and experiences unfold.

As clergy retreats often consist of a small number of participants, several retreats were included in this research. The Queensland head offices of seven religious organisations were approached to identify whether they provided retreats for their clergy. Four organisations (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Uniting Church) offered retreats during the period of data collection and were willing to be involved in this research. This resulted in a total sample of 17 clergy retreats. Retreats ranged in size from 7 to 52 attendees and were held in various locations throughout Queensland, Australia. Although all were considered to be spiritual retreats, two distinct types were offered: reflective retreats (n=10) and educational retreats (n=7). For the purpose of this research, reflective retreats (RR) were defined as providing at least 3 hours per day of quiet time when participants were encouraged to privately reflect. Some reflective retreats were completely or predominantly silent (silent reflective retreats, SRR) while others imposed no or limited expectations regarding silence (non-silent reflective retreats, NSRR). Educational retreats (ER) were more focussed on imparting information to participants, to help them develop professionally, personally, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually with topics such as personal self-care and wellbeing, new initiatives and updates from the local/state/national hierarchies, managing conflict, and maintaining personal, professional and pastoral boundaries. The reflective retreats ranged from 4-5 nights in duration, while the educational retreats were 2-3 nights. A summary of the 17 retreats across the four denominations is provided in Table 2.

Participants and Procedures

Organisers disseminated an email one week prior to the retreat to encourage attending clergy to participate in the research. The researcher then invited the 388 clergy via email (which included a 2 minute video outlining the research purpose), to participate in the study.

Participants were asked to complete three questionnaires. They were asked to provide an email address so that all of their survey responses could be matched. All responses were combined into a single data file and were subsequently de-identified. The first questionnaire was conducted online, one week prior to the retreat (Time 1). A total of 251 questionnaires were completed (response rate = 65%). Before leaving the retreat (Time 2), participants were invited to complete a hard-copy questionnaire, which produced a total of 200 completed questionnaires (response rate = 80% of those who completed the first questionnaire). Two weeks after the retreat (Time 3), participants

received another email with the final online questionnaire, resulting in a total of 152 participants who completed all three questionnaires (response rate = 60% of those who completed first questionnaire or 39% of all eligible participants). In the final questionnaire (Time 3), participants were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up telephone interview. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty participants (21 from reflective retreats and 9 from educational retreats; 22 males and 8 females) with an average duration of 20–30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed for analysis. Interviewees were asked to elaborate on the process and benefits of the retreat experience.

Descriptive data regarding the 152 participants who completed all three questionnaires are presented in Table 3. Chi-square tests comparing those who completed all three questionnaires ($n=152$) and those who completed only the first and/or second questionnaire ($n=99$) showed no significant differences in age, $\chi^2(4) = 7.0, p = .136$, or repeat attendance of the same retreat, $\chi^2(1) = .011, p = .916$, or a similar retreat $\chi^2(1) = 3.209, p = .073$. There were statistically significant differences in gender, $\chi^2(1) = 11.870, p = .001$, with a higher proportion of women completing all three questionnaires; and denomination, $\chi^2(3) = 12.920, p = .005$, with a lower proportion of Catholics completing all three questionnaires.

Instruments

The first questionnaire (Time 1) contained basic demographic questions and a pre-visit measure of participants' Relaxed Mental State (see below). The second questionnaire (Time 2) contained an onsite measure of Relaxed Mental State, participants' level of attention recovery and reflection, and open-ended questions about the retreat experience. The third questionnaire (Time 3) contained a follow-up measure of Relaxed Mental State, asked questions about the benefits gained, and provided space for participants to further describe what they found valuable from the retreat experience.

Relaxed Mental State

An adapted and extended Restored Mental State scale (Packer & Bond, 2010) was used across the three time periods to measure an individual's level of mental fatigue and thus gauge whether any changes had occurred as a result of the retreat experience. The original scale (6 items) covered physical and mental aspects of relaxation, such as feeling refreshed, calm, thoughtful, tranquil, alert and positive. For the current research, three additional items were included from the Swedish Occupational Fatigue Inventory (Ashberg, Garnberale & Kjellberg, 1997) to measure whether participants felt exhausted, uninterested and tired. A 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all and 7 = completely) was used for all 9 items. A factor analysis was used to test whether the nine items represented a single factor. The analysis confirmed one factor, thus a single composite variable was created (fatigue items were reverse scored; Cronbach's alpha = .891) and is referred to as the Relaxed Mental State scale (RMS).

Attention Recovery and Reflection

The Attention Recovery and Reflection Scale (Staats et al., 2003) containing 13 items relating to attention recovery and reflection was included in the onsite questionnaire. (An additional six items relating to social stimulation were not used as they were not relevant to the aims of this research). A

7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = completely) was used, as in the original research. A principal axis factor analysis was performed to verify that Attention Recovery (7 items) and Reflection (6 items) constructs were distinguishable from the onsite (Time 2) measure of Relaxed Mental State (9 items) described above. The analysis confirmed three orthogonal factors: relaxation, recovery and reflection (Cronbach alphas were .905 for the Attention Recovery scale and .878 for the Reflection scale).

Benefits of Retreat

Bond, Packer and Ballantyne's (2015) scale that measures the benefits associated with visits to religious tourism sites was adapted for inclusion in the follow-up questionnaire. The benefits included social benefits, personal growth, spiritual growth, cognitive/learning benefits and restorative benefits and were measured using 20 items (four in each subscale) each rated on a 7-point scale (1 = most important, 7 = least important). Principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation identified three related factors: the first included personal growth, spiritual growth and cognitive benefits, while social and restorative benefits formed the second and third factors respectively. The same subscales were used as in the previous research to aid interpretation of the findings. Composite variables were created for each of the five subscales (Cronbach alpha's were .919; .923; .894; .860; .922 respectively).

Data analysis

Repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine the extent to which the retreats had a measurable and durable impact on participants' recovery from mental fatigue (Aim 1). Two-way ANOVA with repeated measures, and MANOVA were used to compare the impact of different types of retreat (reflective vs educational; and within the reflective category, silent vs non-silent) on restorative outcomes and perceived benefits (Aim 2). All statistical analyses were conducted with a sample of 152 participants who had completed all three questionnaires. The open-ended questionnaire and interview responses were analysed qualitatively to identify themes in relation to the perceived impact of the retreat on participants' mental state (Aim 3) and their perceptions of the unfolding of the restorative process during the retreat (Aim 4).

Results

Results are presented for each of the four research questions in turn.

RQ1: Does a clergy retreat experience have a measurable and durable impact on participants' mental state?

A repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare the Relaxed Mental State (RMS) means based on Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3 composite scores. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2(2) = 16.74, p < .001$), therefore degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\epsilon = .90$). The results demonstrate that RMS mean scores increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, and decreased significantly from Time 2 to Time 3. However, Time 3 scores remained significantly higher than Time 1 scores, $F(1.809, 273.152) = 37.275, p < .001$ indicating that the retreats had an overall positive impact on participants' mental state (Figure 1) and a partial effect persisted for at least two weeks after the retreat.

Insert Figure 1.

RQ2: Do different types of retreats elicit different restorative outcomes and benefits?

Reflective retreats were compared with educational retreats in terms of their impact on three dependent variables: changes in RMS over time (from Time 1 to Time 2 to Time 3); reported levels of Recovery and Reflection immediately after the retreat (Time 2); and ratings of the perceived benefits of the retreat (Time 3). Within the reflective retreat category, silent reflective retreats were compared with non-silent reflective retreats.

Impact of type of retreat on Relaxed Mental State (RMS).

A two-way ANOVA with repeated measures was conducted to investigate whether retreat type (reflective vs educational) had an impact on the extent to which RMS scores changed over time. Within the reflective retreat category, a further analysis was conducted to test the difference between retreats with and without periods of silence (SRR vs NSRR).

Reflective vs educational retreats. An initial t-test comparing RR and ER participants' RMS scores showed no significant difference between groups at Time 1. A two-way ANOVA with repeated measures was performed with type of retreat (RR or ER) as the between-subjects variable and Relaxed Mental State (RMS) as the repeated measure (Time 1, Time 2, Time 3). Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2(2) = 16.08, p < .001$); therefore degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\epsilon = .90$). The two main effects and the interaction effect were all statistically significant (see Figure 2). Of particular interest for this research question is the interaction effect, $F(1.814, 272.14) = 5.791, p = .005$ indicating that type of retreat had an influence on the way RMS scores changed over time. Specifically, reflective retreats resulted in higher RMS at both Time 2 and Time 3.

Insert Figure 2.

Silent reflective retreats vs non-silent reflective retreats. A further two-way ANOVA with repeated measures was performed with silent versus non-silent reflective retreats as the between-subjects variable (see Figure 3). An initial t-test comparing SRR and NSRR participants' RMS scores showed no significant difference between groups at Time 1. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2(2) = 14.65, p < .05$); therefore degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\epsilon = .91$). The interaction effect was significant, $F(1.83, 274.31) = 8.14, p = .001$, indicating that silence did have an impact on the way in which Relaxed Mental State changed over time. Participants in silent retreats reported a higher Relaxed Mental State when measured onsite (Time 2), but this advantage was not maintained in the weeks after the retreat (Time 3).

Insert Figure 3.

Impact of types of retreat on Recovery and Reflection

To explore whether the type of retreat impacted on the level of recovery and reflection (measured in the onsite questionnaire at Time 2), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with recovery and reflection as the dependent variables, and the type of retreat (RR vs ER) as the

independent variable (see Figure 4). The type of retreat had a significant overall impact (Wilk's Lambda = .837, $F = 24.759$, $p < .001$), with significant effects on both recovery ($F(1,256)=49.347$, $p < .001$) and reflection ($F(1,256)=16.248$, $p < .001$). The effect size was higher for recovery than for reflection ($\eta^2 = .162$, $.060$ respectively, see Figure 4). A second MANOVA was conducted using silence (SRR vs NSRR) as the independent variable, and found no significant effect of silence on recovery and reflection (Wilk's Lambda = 1.00, $F = .008$, $p = .992$).

Insert Figure 4.

Impact of type of retreat on perceived benefits

Two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted with perceived benefits of the retreat (measured in the follow-up questionnaire at Time 3) as the dependent variables, and type of retreat as the independent variables (reflective vs educational in the first analysis; silent reflective vs non-silent reflective in the second analysis). The type of retreat (RR or ER) had a significant impact on the perceived benefits of the retreat (Wilk's Lambda = .801, $F = 7.480$, $p < .001$), with reflective retreats producing significantly higher perceived benefits on all five subscales: spiritual benefits ($F(1, 155)=23.101$, $p < .001$); social benefits ($F(1, 155)=5.312$, $p = .023$); personal growth benefits ($F(1, 155)=22.879$, $p < .001$); learning benefits ($F(1, 155)=9.285$, $p = .003$); restorative benefits ($F(1, 155)=19.706$, $p < .001$). In the second analysis, there was a significant impact of silence on the overall perceived benefits of the retreat (Wilk's Lambda = .835, $F = 2.569$, $p = .035$), but none of the five subscales showed a significant difference between SRR and NSRR.

Summary of RQ2 findings

Reflective retreat participants had higher RMS scores at Time 2 and Time 3, reported higher levels of recovery and restoration and also higher spiritual, social, personal growth, learning and restorative benefits compared to educational retreat participants. Silent reflective retreats produced higher RMS scores at Time 2, but no advantage was noted at Time 3 compared to the non-silent reflective retreat participants.

RQ3: How do participants perceive the impact of the retreat on their mental state?

Qualitative data, collated from interviews and responses to open-ended questions, were analysed in order to gain further insight into participants' perceptions of the benefits of the retreat. In the presentation below, interviewees are identified according to the type of retreat they had attended: ER, SRR or NSRR. Pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity. (Open-ended comments extracted from the questionnaire data have not been classified or identified).

When asked about the value of the retreat experience, restorative and social benefits were the most commonly cited themes, followed by spiritual benefits and cognitive benefits.

Restorative benefits

Getting away "*from the daily obligations of work to slow down and recuperate*", "*having some free time to re-create, time to rest*", having "*space to be me*" and "*time to spend just being, time to spend just thinking*" out of the normal work environment and routine were very significant for retreat participants. James {ER} noted how relaxing and unwinding at a retreat is "*a critical thing*".

Jim {SRR} and Simon {NSRR} appreciated being away from the world:

It enabled him "just to be. To be quiet. Stop and pause . . . some of the day-to-day pressure is off, so you end up restored, energized, you're not worried about tomorrow";

"It was refreshing . . . it was so good just to stop. It was like having a holiday. I do the same thing on my holidays. I have that time to sit and do nothing and not be responsible";

Nick {ER} also experienced restorative benefits from the retreat *"because it is a break from normal routine, and I find that refreshing"*, while Matt {ER} *"came away with a real sense of renewal"*.

Another restorative benefit identified by Amon {NSRR} was that of reflection:

"[the retreat was] time away from the ordinary demands of my life, so that I have time to reflect".

Social benefits

In terms of social benefits, participants appreciated: *"the like-minded people at the dinner table", "time for deep and honest sharing / discussion with my colleagues"; "good companionship among participants" and "catching up with people, meeting new colleagues"*. The notion of sharing information and ideas was a valuable outcome of the social connection at retreat.

"I think being with other priests is very valuable, listening to their stories, because you know we are all not just keepers of the truth, everyone else can share information with us which is really important" {Mike, NSRR}.

"You're just busy doing your own work and you don't have a lot of opportunity to feed off what other people are thinking and doing so this is an opportunity for that to happen". {Nick ER}.

Jack {NSRR} reported a deeply significant social interaction that was very important to him:

"I was able to get some clarity around this particular friendship that had frayed at the edges . . . call it reconciliation, healing, transforming a misunderstanding, talking things through with this mate of mine".

Spiritual benefits

In the written responses, participants appreciated *"the opportunity to be led closer to God and encouraged in ministry", "being informed on different aspects of the life of the [region]", "seeing the wider scope of ministry, experiencing the great range of theological positions of attendees", "the chance to worship regularly with others" and "the experience of the Scriptures - presented and then reflected upon"*.

Surprisingly, in the interviews, few participants overtly mentioned specific spiritual benefits. For some, reflection (i.e., a restorative benefit) facilitated a growth in relationship with God, however, this was not often verbalised as the main benefit of the retreat experience. Nathan {ER}, for instance, notes *"I felt just refreshed spiritually . . . I came away I think thankful and walking more closely with God"*.

When spiritual benefits were articulated or implied, it was usually in association with reflective retreats and some degree of silence. Amon {NSRR}, for example, appreciated that *“for those 5 days, [reflection] it’s on my spiritual life and my relationship with God . . . [and this led to] a deepening of my own faith”*.

Cognitive benefits

Some participants noted that cognitive benefits had emerged from the input session content. Fresh insights were gained and some resources provided that they could then share with others. For instance, participants appreciated *“the retreat giver - I’ve gained much from his talks/reflections”*, the *“opportunity for learning”* and *“the chance to think and be stimulated by the retreat conductor”*. Mike {NSRR} elaborated on these ideas in greater detail by explaining:

“Some of the input has been really valuable. Because one of the things in ministry, you just kind of do your own thing and sometimes just that little bit of an input can make you realize ‘oh I didn’t consider this angle or I didn’t consider those options’, so it means you go away with new knowledge”.

However, Kate {ER} suggested that the mental stimulation resulting from discussion and debate may have limited the opportunity to experience mental restoration:

“The topics, the teaching we had was very mentally stimulating and there were some people who disagreed and so I found myself coming away thinking even more. My thoughts were even more scattered or heightened. Hearing people talk - again my thoughts were stimulated. I wasn’t given - my mind didn’t feel at rest. My thoughts increased if anything”.

Summary of RQ3 findings

Regardless of whether participants attended a reflective retreat or educational retreat, there is clear qualitative evidence of restorative, social, spiritual and cognitive benefits resulting from the experience. Although format, content, location and attendees varied for each retreat, these four beneficial outcomes were consistently noted by participants.

RQ4 How do participants perceive the unfolding of the restorative process during the retreat?

Qualitative data were also analysed to explore the *process* of restoration as it unfolded during the retreat. This analysis provided some support for Kaplan and Kaplan’s (1989) conceptualisation of a four-step process of clearing the mind of cognitive clutter; recovering directed attention; reflecting on immediate and unresolved personal problems; and reflecting on life’s larger problems and goals. The language used by participants provides rich insight and nuances as to the reality and outworking of restorative benefits as experienced by this professional group.

Clearing the mind of cognitive clutter

Interviewees’ responses suggested that the process of clearing the mind depended on two related elements: being away, and stopping. Even though these terms were often used alongside each other, there was a clear acknowledgment that mentally stopping was required, in addition to simply being away. This confirmed Kaplan’s (1995) notion that a conceptual shift is more important than being physically away, although the two may or may not coexist.

The retreat provided an opportunity to get away from busyness and ministry demands. This was considered essential as it enabled participants to slow down, recharge, recover and reflect.

"Its value for me is always that I stop from what I am doing normally and, you know, change of location, change of everything really. Stopping helps to recharge my batteries. A lot of the time I'm responding to people. I often find retreats a chance for myself, to slow down, and the process of the retreat - it nourishes me" {Jack, NSRR};

"Retreats are a protected quiet space where people can recover from day-to-day work" {Jim, SRR}.

While Jim {SRR} claimed that retreats *"are a protected quiet space"*, it appears this is a result of intentional decision-making and is not guaranteed. For instance, Karen {NSRR} described how setting boundaries to protect the retreat time and space is an intentional decision and necessary for her self-care:

"This sort of dedicated time, where I could - I didn't have my phone, everything was switched off, and I chose that. That was already arranged with my workplace and everyone . . . I kind of put in place that self-care framework . . . I don't know if I would use the word disconnect because that has certain connotations, but it's a protection and I believe taking it seriously".

Other participants reported that it often takes intentional choice and effort to stop and be still in order to experience a conceptual shift while away. Simon {NSRR} noted how *"it takes a while just to calm down. You're rushing for all this time and then all of a sudden you stop. You've got to get rid of all that excess adrenaline and just breathe, and that takes at least 24 hours"*. Indeed the act of stopping is not always easy, as Bob {NSRR} commented: *"usually it's quite heavy-going to actually try to be still."* When probed if it is tiring to try to be still, he responded *"yes, it's probably more mentally tiring in some sense because I'm needing to discipline myself. But then once you get into it, it's reenergizing"*.

In contrast to those who deliberately put boundaries in place to protect the retreat time and space from distractions and interruptions, some participants mentioned they did check their emails so that there would not be a backlog on return to work. Bill {SRR} admitted to feeling a tinge of guilt for having checked emails, which implies an acknowledgement that getting away and stopping normal work is important:

"I maybe have a little sense of guilt looking at my emails because I was concerned that I would be stressed when I got to the end of the week and found there were all these things that needed to be attended to".

Likewise, Jack {NSRR} noted that constant phone interruptions affected his retreat experience: *"I knew that I wasn't as relaxed as I have been on previous retreats because my main secretary kept phoning me. I understand why, but that was particularly distracting"*. Thus even though the retreat participants were physically away from the normal work environment, the interruptions and distractions limited their ability to experience a total conceptual shift.

Jill {SRR} noted why the physical, mental and emotional 'stopping' while at retreat is an important aspect of 'being away' for this professional group:

“The stopping physically is incredibly important. Most of us get sick on retreat because it’s been so long since we’ve stopped. The physical stopping is important. But more important is the emotional stopping, the mental stopping, the stopping so that spirituality can flow back into our lives in ways that has been pushed out because to some extent, we are sort of like a CEO, or a manager of a company”.

Recovering directed attention

Jim {SRR} articulated how being away led to the recovery of his directed attention and enabled him to *“forget about stuff, to not be under the pressure to do this, think about that – you’re able to focus I suppose.”*

Bob {NSRR} also explained that as his mind cleared from the usual noise, demands and cognitive clutter, he was able to focus attention and synthesize the past and present:

“There’s a strong sense of reality without static - not the noise going on. And the pace that I’m going at slows down and a certain clarity of where I’ve come from, not so much where I’m going, but there’s a sense that I’m able to move forward easier because I’ve left the past behind.”

Recovering the ability to direct attention was also described in terms of ‘receiving’ spirituality, clarity and refreshment instead of operating out of a reactive mode that constantly ‘gives’ to others and results in mental fatigue. It thus facilitated a sense of nourishment, energization and restoration.

“We’re very much kind of in a mode of reaction as priests – so we react to situations. So the clarity comes because you don’t have to be creatively thinking spontaneously, it just gives your mind an opportunity to relax. So in that relaxing, that’s where your clarity comes back” {Mike, NSRR}.

“[Refreshment] . . . usually it’s physical – feeling a bit more energy and not as tired, but also mental – ready to get back into things, and spiritual – feeling, you know sometimes you get spiritually drained by things that are happening, so for me it’s all of those. It enables me to get back in and keep going” {Nick, ER}.

Reflecting on immediate and unresolved problems

Consistent with Kaplan’s (1995) model of the restorative process, after recovering the ability to focus attention, participants were able to reflect on current personal problems or work issues. For example, the retreat enabled Frank {SRR} *“the opportunity to repair things and get things back into perspective”*. Similarly, Roger {ER} valued having the time and space to reflect while at retreat because at other times, responding to work demands takes priority:

“Because it was a different situation [to normal environment], I didn’t need to reflect on the things of business, I could reflect on the things of God - it took primary place”.

Several participants noted the importance of relaxation in relation to reflection. Mike {NSRR} found that relaxation enabled him to *“go a little bit deeper in self-reflection”*, while Jim {SRR} suggested *“[relaxation] is integral to being able to get all the benefit from the retreat that you can. I think that’s the first thing that has to happen and then all the other things flow from it”*.

An outcome of reflection, according to Amon {NSRR}, is “*greater personal integration, being more at home with myself, with my own faults, failings, foibles, eccentricities, but also with my personal faith and my commitments*”. Thus the third component appears to unfold in two stages: relaxation and then reflection.

Reflecting on life’s larger problems and goals and priorities

The final component of restoration is being able to reflect not just on past or present issues, but also reflect on larger realities, goals and priorities for the future. Karen {NSRR} described this process:

“[retreat] was gentle and clarifying. I don’t know if it’s a direct linear thing because life isn’t linear. I think it’s a bit more back and forth and all around really. Because as you’re reflecting, you’re going back on your life and then you’re going forward. So it’s not a linear, straight line. It’s not messy and confusing in any way, but maybe meandering is probably the word”.

In synthesizing the past, present and future, several participants noted a change in their outlook. For example, Bob {NSRR} likened the retreat experience to New Year’s Eve, due to a shift in perspective from newly formed resolutions:

“Having a clearer picture of where I am at, emotionally, spiritually, physically. There’s been space to be able to look at relationships, so it is very much across the board. Now I might come out with a whole lot of, its like New Year’s Eve, and come out with a whole lot of resolutions, so that I can be more productive and more at peace. [Some] aspects of it do stay. So I think there tends to be a shift that does happen and that shift tends to be fairly permanent”.

Reflection engendered a shift in perspective, which according to Bob, “tends to be fairly permanent”. Frank {SRR} mentioned a similar notion by identifying that the retreat provides an opportunity to create strategies in order to remain “re-centred” and “balanced” once back in the normal environment:

“It’s really about coming back to base all the time. I see a retreat as being a chance to get re-centred, and to look at strategies for when you’re back to keep that more in place where its fallen away over the past 12 months for this or that reason”.

Similarly, Amon {NSRR} used the term “re-orienting” along with the illustration of restoring a painting to describe how integrating the past, present and future adds value and focus to future goals:

“Restore, revive, revitalize would be words that I would use. Reorienting would be what I would say, taking the material on board that the retreat leader was giving and doing an examination of one’s own life and seeing areas where you need to repent and convert again. Your own personal focus can go off course so you need to reorient - how I am tracking? I then add value to restoring because restoring at times can have a sense of loss or depletion. If you’re restoring something, I’m looking at a painting here on the wall and if it was in need of restoration, the dirt would have to be taken off and all of that, so there would be something of that process going on to us personally when we involved ourselves in the annual retreat.

But also there's this reorienting so that you're coming back to your goals, your commitments".

Likewise, the higher-level process of reflecting on the future is implied by Karen {NSRR} as a key outcome of the spiritual retreat experience, when she said *"I don't know why it's called retreat, why it's not called advance, because it's a moving forward, so even the word retreat is an interesting word"*.

Evidently, participants see the retreat as an opportunity to reflect, refocus, re-centre and move forward. Frank {SRR} astutely notes that this benefits not only self, but also others due to improved interactions and relationships:

"I think when you don't have the discipline of prayer and silence you don't deal with [some] people very nicely, you fob them off or ignore them or whatever. But it gives you the ability somehow, because you've gone deeply into yourself and seen your own vulnerabilities, your own weaknesses, you can be better in how you deal with people".

Summary of RQ4 findings

The restorative process that unfolded during the retreat experience, as described by participants, supports Kaplan & Kaplan's (1989) four-step process. The qualitative data demonstrates that being away does not automatically lead to recovery and reflection. Rather, intentional choices to stop - in a physical, emotional and mental sense - are critical. As participants' minds were cleared of cognitive clutter and the usual demands to respond and give to others, they recovered the ability to focus attention. Consequently, they had the mental space to reflect on immediate issues as well as take a longer-term outlook and assess their goals and priorities. This resulted in fresh perspectives, re-orienting and re-focusing, and moving forward in a more positive state of mind.

Discussion

The aims of this study were to investigate whether a spiritual retreat experience has a measurable restorative impact on participants' mental state, whether different types of retreat elicit varying restorative outcomes, how participants perceive the impact of the retreat on their mental state and how the restorative process unfolds while at retreat. Data from 152 participants were analysed in this mixed methods study and provide evidence to illustrate the positive impact of retreats.

Spiritual retreats were shown to have a significant and positive impact on participants' mental state. Although the level of restoration decreased in the two weeks following the retreat, there was still a measurable improvement compared to baseline levels. Thus, not only do clergy desire retreats to enhance their well-being (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2012), the findings of this study suggest that retreats have a positive impact on participants' mental state. Hence, annual spiritual retreats could be utilised both as a preventative technique to guard against mental fatigue and burnout, as well as an opportunity to support those whose mental wellbeing requires intervention.

Different types of retreat elicit varying levels of restoration. Although participants of both educational and reflective retreats reported improvements in their relaxed mental state while on retreat, reflective retreat participants experienced a greater increase than educational retreat participants. This is not surprising given that educational retreats include several hours of delivered

content each day which requires significant amounts of directed attention. As one ER participant noted, the mental stimulation limited the opportunity to experience restoration

Silent reflective retreats were more effective than non-silent reflective retreats in achieving a relaxed mental state during the retreat. Silence enables a quietening of the mind (Huszar, 2016), facilitates greater understanding, deep thoughtfulness and absence of mental activity (Jensen, 1973). External silence can encourage inner stillness and thereby awaken and encourage the spiritual life (Mantzarides, 2011). However, there was no evidence that silence resulted in higher levels of recovery or reflection, and the impact on relaxation was not sustained over time.

Follow-up measures indicated that the relaxed mental state experienced during the retreat decreased within two weeks, across all retreat types (ER, SRR, NSRR). Such fade-out effects are consistent with observations by De Bloom (2009) who notes vacation effects are usually temporary and fade-out within two to four weeks of vacation. Nonetheless, as all Time 3 scores were higher than Time 1 scores, the retreats did have a positive impact on participants' perceived mental state.

Interviewees' responses suggest that restorative outcomes from the retreat experience are at least as important as the social, spiritual and cognitive benefits. This is consistent with Bond, Packer and Ballantyne's (2015) findings regarding religious tourism experiences. The restorative outcomes described in the present research are related to some of the changes noted by Thailand retreat participants who reported a more positive perspective after reflecting on their lives, enabling them to feel better able to handle stressful situations in daily life (Fu, Tanyatanaboon & Lehto, 2015). The social benefits acknowledged by some participants of this study align with Bone's (2013) findings that community and connection with others and God were often sought by retreat attendees.

The unfolding process of restoration described by retreat participants gives further insight into the ways in which restorative outcomes develop. Relaxation was a crucial component of the retreat experience for many participants and usually preceded deep reflection. This is consistent with the notion of attention recovery and reflection being separate constructs (Herzog et al., 1997; Kaplan, 1989; Staats et al., 2003). Key aspects of the retreat experience such as being away from the normal work environment, avoiding distractions and resting from mental effort (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) enabled a clearing of cognitive noise (Kaplan, 1995). Being away on retreat enabled participants to separate from their normal routine and enter into a liminal space where *communitas* evolved and restoration unfolded, which is akin to Turner's (1969) findings regarding rituals and pilgrimage. Nelson-Johnson (2015) observed that the experience of liminal space and *communitas* on a weekend retreat within Roman Catholicism led to healing and transformation for many attendees. In terms of the current study, in quietness and stillness participants found greater clarity, insight, fresh perspective as well as a reorienting and realigning of their values, purpose and future direction. These findings are similar to the restorative experiences gained from retreating to a Benedictine Monastery, which include feeling rested, relaxed, clear-headed and positive, with visitors appreciating the opportunity to reflect and pray (Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005).

The research findings have practical implications for retreat organisers and attendees, as well as offering theoretical contributions. Relaxation was shown to provide an important basis for the emergence of deeper levels of restorative benefits. Placing boundaries around the retreat time and space allows these processes to unfold, and thus enhances restorative benefits. As noted by Hartig (2007, p.164), "a restorative environment promotes, not merely permits, restoration". If a person is

distracted (for instance, due to interruptions stemming from their normal working environment), their potential to experience restoration is hindered. In addition, retreats that incorporate some degree of reflection into the program will be more restorative for participants. It would be helpful to educate retreat participants regarding the process of restoration and the factors that support and facilitate deeper benefits.

This study has contributed to the niche area of religious tourism and restoration by demonstrating the restorative benefits of spiritual retreats. While previous research into retreats has hinted at the transformative and restorative potential of retreats, the current research has utilised a more comprehensive research design to show comparisons across different types of spiritual retreats. Although the qualitative and quantitative data have provided rich insights into the process and benefits of restoration, the study was subject to a number of limitations. These need to be addressed in future research. For instance, the length and type of retreat could not be disentangled in this study due to the limited range of retreat sites that were able to be included. Similarly, due to the sample size, denomination was unable to be used as a dependent variable in the analyses. Future research could explore denominational differences as well as a wider variety of retreats, of different lengths, in various settings. As silent retreats were shown to positively impact on-site mental state measures, it would be useful to further explore the process, impact and effectiveness of silent retreats in achieving restorative and other benefits. The transition from retreat into normal routine would also be a worthwhile topic for further research, with the aim of identifying strategies for increasing the longevity of restorative benefits after participating in a spiritual retreat.

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Table 1: McKercher's (2016) Personal Quest Need Family and Norman's (2012) classification of five spiritual tourist experiences

McKercher's (2016) tourism product taxonomy – Personal Quest Need Family	Norman's (2012) classification of five spiritual tourist experiences
Personal history: diaspora; genealogy/roots; personal memory	Quest
Religious: pilgrimage; sacred travel; religious; missionary safaris; spiritual retreats	Retreat / Collective
Medical / wellness: procedures; health; wellness	Healing / Experiment
Learning: cultural exchange; study tour; service learning; immersion programmes; personal development	Quest / Experiment

Table 2. Type of retreat by denomination

	Anglican	Catholic	Lutheran	Uniting
Retreats offered	7	6	1	3
Reflective (RR)	4	6	0	0
Silent (SRR)	2	2		
Non-Silent (NSRR)	2	4		
Educational (ER)	3	0	1	3

Table 3. Participant demographic information

	Anglican	Catholic	Lutheran	Uniting
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	52 (58%)	22 (100%)	9 (64%)	15 (56%)
Female	37 (42%)	0	5 (36%)	12 (44%)
Total	89	22	14	27
<i>Age</i>				
20-39	8 (9%)	2 (9%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
40-49	8 (9%)	4 (18%)	3 (21%)	6 (22%)
50-59	33 (37%)	3 (14%)	9 (65%)	6 (22%)
60+	40 (45%)	13 (59%)	1 (7%)	15 (56%)
Total	89	22	14	27
<i>Attended this retreat previously *</i>				
Yes	61 (69%)	15 (68%)	12 (86%)	13 (72%)
No	27 (31%)	7 (32%)	2 (14%)	5(28%)
Total	88	22	14	18
<i>Attended similar retreat previously *</i>				
Yes	79(90%)	16 (76%)	9 (64%)	20 (74%)
No	9(10%)	5 (24%)	5 (36%)	7 (26%)
Total	88	21	14	27

* Indicates some missing data