Don't let the little man live in your head for free

An interpretive phenomenological analysis of seafarers with reportedly high levels of well-being

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by

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DECLARATION

I hereby guarantee that the work presented in this thesis is written by myself entirely except where other sources are clearly and identifiably cited.

Lauren Natalie Brown

DEDICATION

Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.
They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep.

Psalm 107:23

Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Charles Young, for his endless patience and kindness in guiding me through this process. You treated this thesis as if it were your own, spending hours poring over it to ensure no stone was left unturned.
You have been a dedicated and highly knowledgeable supervisor.

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thank you both for believing that I could do this, especially when I stopped believing it myself.

ABSTRACT

The mental health of seafarers has become a growing issue of concern and has attracted the attention of researchers in recent times. Seafarers are predominantly men, spend months at sea with little to no contact with loved ones ashore, and usually must reside in confined spaces that often contain substantial levels of noise and heat. The underlying causes of mental illness among seafarers are known. Some of the causes include sleep deprivation, occupational stress, marital/relationship problems, fatigue, the threat of piracy, psychosocial workload, loneliness, social isolation, separation from families, lack of shore leave, cultural issues, and job security. Despite these stressors, there are many men and women seafarers who flourish in the industry and enjoy their careers. Very little research has been conducted into the well-being practices of those seafarers who enjoy high levels of well-being.

This study explores the lived experiences of a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being, as well as their experiences of workplace stressors and mental health interventions offered by the industry. This study is an interpretive phenomenological analysis, which is epistemologically underpinned by phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Results revealed four focus areas: general lived experiences across two worlds and how this relates to identity, what seafarers with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being experience as stressors, well-being practices of these seafarers and how these seafarers experience and make sense of mental health interventions they have come across.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APA:	American Psychological Association
DBT:	Dialectical Behaviour Therapy
DSM-5:	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th Edition
fMRI:	Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
FSPBS:	Farmer and Sundberg Proneness to Boredom Scale
GHQ-12:	General Health Questionnaire-12
GET:	Group Experiential Theme
IAT:	Standardised Internet Addiction Test
ILO:	International Labour Organisation
IMHA:	International Maritime Health Association
IMO:	International Maritime Organisation
IOSH:	Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
IPA:	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
ISMC:	International Safety Maritime Code
ISPS:	International Ship and Port Facility Security
ITF:	International Transport Workers Federation
JD-R:	Job Demand Resource Model
JES:	Job Engagement Scale
MMP:	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Test
NASA:	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
PERMA:	Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment
PET:	Personal Experiential Theme
PFRS:	Profile of Fatigue Related Symptoms
PGWBI:	Psychological General Well-Being Index
POS:	Perceived Organisational Support
PTSD:	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
PWB:	Psychological Well-being
SA:	South Africa
SDT:	Self Determination Theory
SF 36:	Short Form Health Survey
SSS:	Student Stress Survey
SWB:	Subjective Well-being
UK:	United Kingdom
UWES:	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

USA:	United States of America
WHO:	World Health Organisation
WBV:	Whole Body Vibration
WPP:	Workplace PERMA Profiler

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At last, the anchor was up, the sails were set, and off we glided.
Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 143)*

1.1 Introduction

Seafaring is an exciting and fulfilling career for many people. However, it is also considered to be one of the most stressful occupations in the world (Carotenuto, Molino, Fasanaro & Amenta, 2012). McVeigh, MacLachlan and Kavanagh (2016) suggest that seafarers live in a "fusion of paradoxes" (p. 20) – they are socially excluded, but live and work in close proximity to others; they are confined, but in a large, open space; multiculturalism is the norm, but amid the distinct organisational culture of the ship. The following two descriptions of the early 19th century seafarer are both considered to be accurate, but they stand in contradiction to each other and illustrate this paradoxical nature of seafaring. The first quotation describes an individual who is independent and free. The second describes an individual who is trapped and unable to escape:

> *"[The seafarer] retained a degree of independence almost unknown to his class at the time. He was mobile. If he disliked his ship, he would find another… A spirit bold enough to embark for the far side of the world, a man with the strength and skill to clamber aloft in choppy seas and wrestle canvas while a wind blasted through the rigging – he was always a rare commodity"* (Taylor, 2020, p.17).

> *"Men go to sea before they know the unhappiness of that way of life; and when they have come to know it, they cannot escape from it, because it is then too late to choose another profession"* (Boswell, 1929, p.276).

These paradoxes, unique to the maritime industry, seem to take their toll and have been proven to be highly problematic. Research indicates that seafarers as professionals are at extremely high risk for occupational stress (Lipowski, Lipowska, Peplinska & Jezewska, 2014). Indeed, research has focused on the occupational stressors that seafarers face, with very little research conducted on the well-being practices that act as buffers against these sources of stress.

Despite these stressors and facing immense obstacles, there are men and women who flourish in their careers at sea. These seafarers became the focus of my research. I wanted to know how these individuals experience the maritime industry. Do they have certain practices or ways of approaching these stressors that act as buffers? What makes them enjoy their careers, even though they spend inordinate amounts of time away from loved ones on board what Lamvick (2012) notes is akin to a prison?

1.2 The research problem

In the general workforce, the link between occupational stress and poor mental health has been proven. Occupational stress has been found to be a significant predictor of anxiety disorders (see DiGiacomo & Adamson, 2001 and Mensah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016). It is positively correlated with clinical symptoms of depression (Mensah & Amponsah-Tawia, 2016) and has a significant inverse correlation with positive mental health across a wide range of industries and sectors (Moreno Fortes et al., 2020). In keeping with this data, and as will be demonstrated in the literature review of this thesis, studies regarding occupational stress in the maritime industry have typically focused on the negative impact that occupational stress has on mental health. In addition, data collection has been primarily in quantitative forms, with very little research (qualitative or quantitative) conducted on mental health interventions or well-being practices. As a result, researchers (see for example Vij & Goyal, 2018) have identified an urgent need for the industry to focus on understanding how psychological health-related risks and stressors for the individual seafarer can be minimised and addressed, and how seafarers can boost their individual well-being. This urgent need is problematic as the maritime industry finds itself ill-equipped to deal with seafarer mental health.

1.3 The study

This study applies a participant-centred, experiential approach referred to as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA has been the subject of several changes which have been outlined in Smith and Nizza's (2021) latest textbook on the research approach, Smith being one of the founders of the approach. This thesis follows the updated recommendations made in this book. Recently completed doctoral theses that have been supervised by Smith himself have informed the structure followed in this thesis (see for example Gee, 2018; Fieldsend, 2019; and Starr, 2020).

The study used IPA to answer the following research questions:

Primary research question

- *What are the lived experiences of a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being (PWB)?*

This was then broken down into three sub-questions:

- *How is occupational stress experienced by a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*
- *How is well-being experienced by a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*
- *How do a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB make sense of mental health and mental health interventions?*

1.4 The chapters

Chapter two provides a background to seafaring and occupational stressors related to the career. Specific stressors, such as fatigue and time away from family, are described in detail. The chapter then goes on to explain how improving occupational well-being has been recommended in the general sector as a response to dealing with stress at work. In fact, many industries have seen a shift in focus from occupational stress to occupational well-being. The reasons for this shift in focus will be explained in further detail in this chapter. The chapter will end with a brief description of how this focus has manifested in the maritime industry.

Chapter three presents an overview of the extant research as it pertains to seafarer occupational mental health and well-being. This literature review is organised by date, critiquing research spanning over two decades. The findings of this review point out that quantitative literature far outweighs qualitative literature, and that literature specifically focused on seafarer well-being and the psychological aspect to seafaring is slowly but steadily emerging, although literature of this nature remains limited.

Chapter four will expand upon the concept of occupational well-being. Since well-being can be defined in many ways, this chapter will include a full description of the history of the concept, as well as the various models that researchers in occupational health have used to explain it, and the advantages and disadvantages of each model. Finally, Seligman's conceptualisation of five building blocks well-being, along with its usefulness in the study of occupational well-being, will be discussed. His understanding of well-being was used to identify an information-

rich sample of participants who have high levels of psychological well-being (PWB) as conceptualised by Ryff (2014) and Seligman (2011). This sample would serve as the sample from which to collect the data for the study.

Chapter five describes the methodology underpinning this study. Phenomenological philosophy and its epistemological foundations are discussed. This chapter also provides the practical underpinnings of IPA that shaped my research process. Since IPA has been the subject of some criticism, a review of these criticisms as well as a response to each is included in this chapter. This chapter then concludes with a description of the latest changes to IPA, as outlined by Smith and Nizza (2021).

Chapter six describes the overall design of the project and details the practical methods used to capture a full IPA study, including sampling, recruitment of participants, and interviewing decisions. It also explains the stages of analysis.

Chapter seven provides a detailed reporting of the analysis and interpretation of the data. Verbatim extracts from the participants' original transcripts are used to justify interpretations. The data is discussed thematically. It begins with themes that relate to the general lived experiences of seafarers, before moving into more specific data that relates to experiences of occupational stress on board, well-being, and mental health interventions.

Chapter eight explores themes that emerged from the data while also connecting the themes to research presented in the literature review. As recommended by IPA researchers, new literature in addition to that explored in the literature review of this thesis may be used to interpret the findings (Smith et al., 2009). New literature is therefore also introduced in this chapter for this purpose.

Chapter nine presents conclusions and recommendations which might be helpful to seafarers and other stakeholders in the industry who would like to address seafarer mental health and well-being. This chapter also makes suggestions for further research. Consideration is given to the methodological coherence and quality of the study.

1.5 The significance of the study

This research project contributed to the knowledge base on seafarer mental health and well-being. The industry itself may benefit as the findings have generated a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of seafarers. In addition to this, through this research, shipping

companies, ship owners and seafaring charities may be able to implement specific well-being programmes and interventions that could help seafarers. Furthermore, the findings of this study have directly benefited seafarers themselves by identifying potential practical strategies to enhance well-being and give seafarers a voice to describe their experiences of occupational stressors and well-being. The qualitative data that was collected may shed light on quantitative data which has dominated the research on seafarer mental health and well-being. Finally, the analysis of the findings in this study conveyed valuable information that might guide future research on the topic of seafarer mental health.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

This seems so outlandish a thing that one must go a little into the history and philosophy of it.

Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 143)*

2.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter introduces the reader to the maritime industry and its history, which dates back over centuries. It examines how the past has shaped the maritime industry, both as a whole and in its approach to issues related to occupational health and safety. A discussion of the primary occupational stressors impacting seafarers is included in this chapter. Some of these occupational stressors are unique to the maritime industry. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the relationship between occupational stress and occupational well-being, along with a discussion on why I chose to focus on occupational well-being rather than occupational stress in this research project.

2.2 A brief history of seafaring

In the late 1500s, Francis Drake and 166 seafarers circumnavigated the globe aboard the *Golden Hind* (Taylor, 2020). This voyage was deemed relatively successful, with Drake bringing home 59 of the 166 men who sailed with him, along with kilograms of gold and a vast quantity of looted treasure. At this, the idea of unimaginable wealth and riches beyond one's wildest dreams was born in the minds of the British and ultimately the rest of the world (Taylor, 2020). Seamen would return home with fantastical tales (some of them true) of exotic sea monsters, strange cultures, and foreign lands. At a time when most men would end up never leaving the town in which they were born, the seafarer was admired by all for his stories of the pillage and plunder of distant countries. It was also during this time that books such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot* contributed to the forming of a new genre of literature known as nautical fiction. The characteristic themes of this genre, such as a focus on masculinity, courage and heroism, adventure and discovery, and the intense, often psychological struggles of an individual amid a hostile sea, added to the notion that the seafarer lived a life of which most could only dream. Some of these themes are illustrated by the protagonist in *Moby Dick*, Ishmael, who explains his reason for working at sea:

> *"...but as for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts. By reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the*

> *great floodgates of the wonder-world swung open" (Melville, 1988, p. 12).*

While the life of the average seafarer could be considered far more exciting than most of his peers, the reality is that certain aspects of the job would shatter many of the Hollywood-based notions of a swashbuckling life on the high seas. Samuel Johnson, a 19th century British author, declared that being on a ship was like being in a jail, with the added chance of drowning (Taylor, 2020). This dire declaration was plausible; in 1806, for example, records showed that 2 413 seafarers died abroad, with only 177 of these men being over the age of 40 (Cook, 2019). Drowning, cholera, dysentery, yellow fever, scurvy, and alcoholism were common causes of death (Cook, 2019). At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, London's docklands were inundated with local and international seafarers, many of whom were without family or friends and suffering from sexually transmitted or tropical diseases (Fischer, 1991). The desperate plight of these individuals and the growing concern regarding their physical, mental, and emotional well-being led to the establishment of the Seamen's Hospital Society in 1921 (Cook, 2019). The main aim of the society was to protect the lives of seafarers by impressing upon them the importance of the Christian faith, while at the same time caring for their various physical and psychological needs. Conditions aboard, however, remained at a level that would have been inapprehensible to the public. A description of the living conditions, recorded in 1890, is noted by Cook (2019, para. 1):

> *"...here fourteen sailors and apprentices washed, dressed, and had their food [*which consisted*] almost entirely of inferior salted pork, unpalatable beef and brown biscuits, too often mouldy and full of maggots… the forecastle was full of rats which found their way into the hammocks in which crew slept. There was also the foul stench of bilge water, and the drinking water was heavily contaminated"*.

In time, sail gave way to steam as the world became more industrialised. This was a time of severe economic disruption. The industrialisation of the shipping industry saw trade grow faster than ever before (Fischer, 1991). Given the new technology available in the latter half of the nineteenth century, trade allowed merchant shipping to link buyers and sellers in different parts of the world. Investment in shipping thus increased significantly and while this was good news for the industry, the demand for seamen to manage the vessels increased (Fischer, 1991). This then resulted in the formalisation of the industry, and with it the creation of harsh labour laws that meant that seamen could be imprisoned for breaking their contracts

(Milne, 2016). It was during this time that seafarers started forming and joining unions, seeking improved working conditions and better pay (Cook, 2019).

Despite this, it was not the plight of the individual seafarer that instigated change in working conditions as much as the occurrence of several maritime disasters. These led to the creation of policies to prevent similar disasters and protect the lives of seafarers. In 1914, for example, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea was conceived, following the very unexpected sinking of the Titanic in 1912 (Joseph & Dalaklis, 2021). Another example is the Ro-Ro Ferry Herald of Free Enterprise accident in 1987, that resulted in the deaths of all 193 people aboard only minutes after it had left the Belgian port of Zeebrugge. This catastrophe led to the development of the International Safety Management Code (ISM Code) in 1989 (Joseph & Dalaklis, 2021). These maritime disasters, and several others, have played a critical role in reducing loss of life in the merchant navy.

Following several these shipping disasters and subsequent loss of life, the industry's focus continued to narrow on the human element to seafaring. Illustrating that the need for this remained critical, an examination of the risk of work site casualties aboard Polish ships between the years of 1960 and 1999 found that the risk of accident casualties far exceeded the widely accepted level of one death per 1000 employees per year (Jaremin, 2005). In response to the concern expressed by stakeholders in the maritime industry, the Donaldson Report was published in 1994. The Donaldson Report was the outcome of an inquiry ordered by the British government, with the goal of preventing pollution from merchant shipping (Horrocks, 1995). The report pointed to human error as the root cause of over 80% of all shipping accidents (Horrocks, 1995). It contained 103 recommendations to ensure safer ships and safer seas, many of which were adopted by various shipping companies. Since the Donaldson Report identified fatigue as a critical contributory factor to human error, this subsequently became a popular focus area of initial research related to seafarer mental health (Horrocks, 1995). Around that time, the Australian maritime industry, which had undergone huge reforms to improve efficiency following the rapid globalisation of the industry, initiated a project to investigate the impact of the changes in the industry on seafarer stress, fatigue and physical health (Parker, Hubinger, Green, Sargent & Boyd, 1997). This project was one of the first to focus on seafarer well-being, with the goal of offering a benchmark for reform in the industry that benefited seafarers directly (Parker et al., 1997).

In other countries, strides continued to be made towards protecting the lives of seafarers. A surveillance of maritime deaths aboard Danish merchant ships from 1986 to 2009 revealed that the number of deaths was significantly reduced in all three categories of the research

focus, namely accidents, disease, and suicide (Borch, Hansen, Burr & Jepsen, 2012). Accidents, for example, were found to have decreased from 66.6 per 100 000 person years between 1986 and 1993 to 27.0 per 100 000 person years between 2002 and 2009 (Borch et al., 2012). This favourable trend was assumed to be because of preventative measures, such as improved work environment and better safety practices (Borch et al., 2012). However, in the next two to three decades following the implementation of various policies such as the ISM Code, the safety of seafarers remained an issue of concern. For example, an analysis conducted in 2012 found that between the years of 2002 and 2009, seafarers aboard Danish merchant ships remained six times more likely to die from occupational accidents than shore workers (Borch et al., 2012).

Today sees the average seafarer working in conditions that must align with international safety standards, set in place by the International Labour Organisation, that aim to promote an equitable working environment. These standards emphasise freedom, security, and the dignity and welfare of seafarers. Adequate conditions for living and working, health protection, access to medical care, welfare, and social protection are covered in these labour standards (Amante, 2014). Because of this, seafaring can be an exciting, fulfilling career, and indeed it is for many men and women. However, despite these huge strides in protecting the rights of seafarers and their collective well-being, the industry remains one with a high degree of occupational stressors, many unique to the industry, that can be to the detriment of even the most resilient seafarer.

2.3 Occupational stress

2.3.1 Introduction and definition

One of the most recent definitions of occupational stress is “strain, depression, fretfulness, anxiety, and angst one faces in his [*sic*] workplace when he [*sic*] is overloaded with copious demands and expectations which he [*sic*] has to complete within a limited time-frame” (Burman & Goswami, 2018, p. 112). This definition conceptualises work stressors as external demands and expectations that overload an employee, and it can be argued that Dollard, Winefield and Winefield (2001) concur with this conceptualisation in their description of work stressors being *objective*. They note that work stress is a natural reaction to objective stressors. Chen and Silverthorne (2008) direct their focus more to the ability of the employee (or lack thereof) in their defining occupational stress as stress owing to the individual’s inability to respond to or handle the specific workplace situation skilfully. Yang and Khan (2015) emphasise not so much the reasons behind the individual’s experience of stress, but more the chronic nature of stressors in the workplace, which might appear manageable for a short period of time but

eventually take their toll. While clearly several definitions of the concept exist, most appear to converge on two themes – first, that occupational stress has a physical and psychological impact on an individual, and second that there is an imbalance in the fit between the employee's capacity and their workplace demands.

2.3.2 Occupational stress in the general sector

The impact of occupational stress has been researched extensively. Interest in the area continues to grow, as suggested by Burman and Goswami (2018) who note that most of the research on the topic has been published only in the last ten years. A few of the most significant findings will be briefly mentioned here before the focus is narrowed to the maritime industry.

Burman and Goswami's (2018) systematic literature review of 203 papers on the topic of work stress from 1993 to 2017 included literature on various definitions of the concept, as well as methodologies, industries and demographics of work stress. The researchers found that stress at work across sectors affects the employee's social life and has an adverse impact on the families of employees. Work stress influences employee job performance and productivity and is found to have an adverse impact on employee physical health (Burman & Goswami, 2018). This is a problem that appears to be global in nature. Problems arising from employee stress levels have been found to cost American companies as much as $300 billion in annual health care (Moreno Fortes, Tian & Huebner, 2020) and employee stress is currently the leading cause of absenteeism at work in the United Kingdom (Moreno Fortes et al., 2020). Research amongst African and Asian employees in Cabo Verde and China respectively found a direct and statistically significant correlation between occupational stress and burnout for both (Moreno Fortes et al., 2020).

Burman and Goswami (2018) populated a list of major work stressors that extend across a variety of different fields of work. These stressors include long working hours, low income, excessive workload, poor physical environment in terms of noise or air quality, unsupportive family, lack of opportunities to improve job skills, inadequate resources to complete the allotted task, job insecurity, job dissatisfaction, issues related to leave, unsound organisational policies, and role ambiguity (Burman & Goswami, 2018). As will be shown later in this chapter, several of these stressors are faced by seafarers.

2.3.3 Occupational stress in the maritime sector

The seafaring environment is unique. Seafarers live, work, and socialise within the confines of one environment: the ship. This unique environment in turn creates a collection of

occupational stressors. A review of literature on seafarer welfare between the years of 2006 and 2016 found that major occupational stressors for seafarers include the work environment, issues related to gender, multicultural crews, changes to marine security policies post 9/11, technology advancement leading to increased automation of activities and fewer crew on board, shift work leading to fatigue, shorter port turnaround time, and an increase in piracy worldwide (Jagosh, Pike, Henderson & Calderón, 2017). Most of these stressors have been proven to have an adverse effect on the individual seafarer. To understand this adverse effect, a description of these industry-specific occupational stressors is necessary.

2.3.3.1 Fatigue

Fatigue has been identified as a significant stressor for seafarers (Hystad & Eid, 2016). Seafaring is shift work, with a wide variety of essential duties needing around-the-clock management under time pressure in a dangerous work environment. These critical operations frequently take place during the night, potentially disturbing the normal circadian rhythms of the seafarer (Hystad & Eid, 2016). Poor sleep quality, disturbed sleep patterns and ultimately, fatigue, are the result. Limits and prescriptions related to hours of work and rest are set out clearly by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). However, compliance is reported to be poor (Grech, 2016). Shipping functions in a highly competitive environment, and reduced crew size (which is economically efficient) is often prioritised over issues of safety (Grech, 2016).

Despite these organisational issues that cause severe fatigue, the physical motion of the ship is another factor that could result in symptoms of fatigue in the form of a disorder called Sopite Syndrome. Sopite Syndrome, a neurological disorder caused by prolonged periods of motion, is a constellation of symptoms that includes drowsiness, apathy, lethargy, yawning, sleep disturbances and at times even mild depression (Matsangas, McCauley & Becker, 2014). Even mild symptoms of Sopite Syndrome have been found to cause a decline in cognitive multitasking performance, with regards to visual perception and short-term memory (Matsangas et al., 2014).

It is not difficult to imagine the catastrophic consequences of seafarer fatigue. Grech (2016) and Jepsen, Zhao, Pekcan, Barnett and van Leeuwen (2017) identified a lack of fatigue management as one of the primary causes of several recent maritime accidents. Quantitative research based upon correlation analysis of factors related to fatigue from 93 shipping accidents showed that a ship operator struggling with fatigue raises the probability of the ship grounding by 23% (Aktar & Utne, 2014). One of the most influential of these catastrophes is the grounding of the Shen Neng 1 off the coast of Australia in 2010. The ship’s chief officer

had failed to program a course change into the ship's GPS navigation system owing to fatigue (Jepsen, et al., 2017). The ship's engine was damaged when the ship ran aground, resulting in the polluting of a large part of the Great Barrier Reef (Jepsen et al., 2017). The ensuing investigation into the incident found that there was a lack of training and knowledge amongst the crew with regards to managing fatigue and there was also no effective fatigue management system in place on the ship (Jepson et al., 2017).

From an objective point of view, one of the obvious solutions to this problem might be to implement fatigue management training for seafarers, who need to be conscious of their own limits. Indeed, researchers have argued that there is only so much that can be done from an organisational or legislative perspective to solve issues related to seafarer fatigue and that the individual seafarer must take responsibility (Jepsen et al., 2017). However, the complexity of this issue is illustrated when taking into consideration exactly why the chief mate of the Shen Neng 1 was so fatigued. The loading of cargo at the Port of Gladstone, near Queensland, prior to the grounding, was the chief mate's first loading operation at that specific port. Understandably, his lack of experience caused him to become concerned that de-ballasting (a critical process needed to provide adequate stability to vessels during loading/unloading) would not keep up with the loading of cargo, which would cause delays. Delays cost money. Thus, the chief mate stayed awake for most of the time in port to monitor the process, and when he took over from the second mate at the bridge after departure, had slept only about two hours in the previous 40. The chief mate did not mention how little sleep he had received in the 40 hours prior to the accident, and surely, he should have told the second mate or master. Again, this does seem to substantiate the argument that it is the individual seafarer who must manage his own fatigue responsibly, and thus be taught how to do so. However, again the complexity of this occupational stressor is highlighted. Grech (2016) reports that most seafarers are willing to work while experiencing extreme fatigue because it is the "professional" thing to do, and because it is widely accepted that fatigue (along with the expectation of working through it) comes with the job. Grech (2016) notes that this pushes the crew into a trap of compliance, where they feel it becomes their own responsibility to manage completely unrealistic levels of fatigue while performing critical operational tasks. The chief mate's decision to continue with his shift, despite clearly exhibiting an impaired ability to reason because of utter exhaustion, is actually quite understandable.

2.3.3.2 Time away from family

A second occupational stressor facing seafarers is the time spent away from family and friends. While this is an inevitable part of the job, and one of which seafarers should be fully aware when choosing the career, the full impact of this on family life may not be fully

conceptualised by young seafarers who are making important career decisions. Seafarers spend months at sea with little to no contact with loved ones ashore. Important family events, birthdays, milestones achieved by their children, religious holidays, weddings and funerals are often missed. It is noted that access to the Internet while at sea has made interaction with family and friends more feasible than ever before; however, research has found that when problems arise at home, frequent communication does not act as an adequate substitute for physical presence (Carotenuto et al., 2012). In fact, the increased level of communication with family has in effect created a new role for the seafarer – cyber manager of family problems. This in turn impacts on work performance. It becomes extremely difficult to work productively when one is physically on the ship but mentally at home (Carol-Dekker, 2018) worrying about a sick child, a lonely spouse or burst water mains.

2.3.3.3 Alcohol-use

While alcohol-use would not traditionally be considered an occupational stressor, it is included in this section because of the complex role it plays with other stressors on board. Alcohol-use in seafarers increases the risk of accidents on board and has traditionally posed a significant health risk on board ships. For example, fatal accidents among Swedish seafarers between 1920 and 1929 revealed that 44% of accidents on board were partially caused by alcohol (Ross, 1977). Because of this significant safety risk, the IMO called for preventative measures regarding alcohol and drug abuse in the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers Convention in 2010 (Stoll, Püschel, Harth & Oldenburg, 2020). This resulted in most shipping companies declaring their ships dry ships in the years following these new standards, with a zero-alcohol policy on board. Before this, studies estimated the use of alcohol on board ranged from between 10% and 30% of seafarers (see for example Novalbos, Nogueroles, Soriguer & Piniella, 2008 and Fort, Massardier-Pilonchery & Berget, 2009). Apart from the obvious increased risk of accidents, the ILO found British seafarers to be at high risk for alcohol-related diseases such as pancreatic cancer and cirrhosis (Alderton et al., 2004). This led some researchers to declare alcohol consumption a public health risk in this population (Fort et al., 2009).

In some respects, the banning of alcohol on board seems to have had a negative impact on seafarers. The implementation of zero alcohol policies on board saw the end of socialising at the bar when finished with a shift with seafarers having no reason not to retire to their cabins (Carol-Dekker, 2018). In fact, even prior to 2010, employers were starting to implement stricter policies on board with regards to alcohol, with other researchers at that time finding through qualitative data collection methods that the closure of ship bars had started to reduce opportunities for social interaction on board (McKay & Wright, 2007).

2.3.3.4 Social isolation and loneliness

The social life of the seafarer is another area impacted by various work-related factors that cause social isolation. There are several reasons that seafarers are finding themselves more and more isolated. First, the fast turnover time at ports leaves very little time to unwind and cultivate any kind of social life away from work (Carol-Dekker, 2018). This fast turnover time, which is only increasing, is owing to the innovation of the shipping industry, which, ironically, seems to have had a negative impact on the human element to seafaring. From a psychological perspective, Sampson and Wu (2003) report that shore leave in groups strengthens social solidarity and breaks the monotony of life on board and this is why it is so vital to seafarer mental health. In addition to this, modernisation of cargo terminals has decreased the contact time seafarers have with others ashore, and this has resulted in widening the gap between the seafarer and the society on land (Sampson & Wu, 2003).

A second factor impacting the social life of the seafarer is the role of TV aboard. Shipping companies that value the well-being of their staff often install DVD players and TVs aboard and provide Internet access to cabins. The irony is that this attempt at improving crew well-being appears to increase the degree of social isolation, as it is yet another reason for seafarers to retreat to their cabins to watch TV and movies at the end of a shift, rather than choosing to socialise with other members of the crew (Carol-Dekker, 2018).

2.3.3.5 Lack of shore leave

Shore leave is deemed an important part of a seafarer's welfare and is a longstanding custom in the industry (Graham, 2009). This is not only because shore leave allows the seafarer to pursue social life. Leisure time off the ship during a port call has been found to play a pivotal role in the mental health of seafarers (Oldenberg & Jensen, 2019) and thus is a longstanding customary practice in shipping (Mukherjee & Mustafar, 2005). This practice is enshrined in international maritime law. However, post 9/11, there have been significant changes in border control along with much stricter security measures. These measures have unfortunately come at the expense of the seafarer's right to shore leave (Graham, 2009). The chance of a ship being used either to transport weapons or as a weapon itself resulted in the birth of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, developed by the United Nations in partnership with the International Maritime Organisation (Graham, 2009). The ISPS Code in essence requires that:

> *"…contracting governments, government agencies, local administrations and the shipping and port industries detect security*

> *threats and take preventive measures against security incidents affecting ships or port facilities used in international trade"* (IMO, 2003, p.6).

This code, quite unintentionally, resulted in each ship being regarded as a potential threat. Graham (2009) notes that this resulted in increased suspicion directed towards the crew members, sometimes resulting in denial of shore leave. COVID-19 has also resulted in denial of shore leave. In a recent study that looked at the disruptions and challenges to the observance of seafarers' rights to shore leave because of COVID-19, a previously unknown majority preference for shore leave was discovered (Hebbar & Mukesh, 2020). The study included 450 participants and an overwhelming 88% of the participants were visibly impacted by absence of shore leave during the pandemic. Furthermore, the study found that shore leave impacted work performance and, perceivably, the health of the participants.

2.3.3.6 Multiculturalism

Several researchers have examined the role that culture plays in the maritime industry. Carol-Dekker (2018) notes that cultural diversity on board can be a breeding ground for physical and mental problems. One of the reasons for this is that socialising with other crew members can be extremely challenging owing to cultural and language differences in multinational crews. Horck (2006, 2008) has written extensively on the topic of multinational crews coming from India, China, Indonesia, Ukraine, Poland, and the Philippines. He speculates that employing a multinational crew is motivated by financial gain – it affords shipping companies the opportunity to increase their profits by paying crew members from different countries lower wages (Horck, 2006). While one cannot be certain of the motives of shipping companies, what is certain is that a multinational crew means differences in almost all aspects of life, from religion and world view to food choice and dress code. Conflict owing to multicultural crews is known to be one of the main reasons for stress manifesting itself among crew members (Bhargava, 2013).

English is the language of the maritime industry (Horck, 2006) and since many crew members are second language speakers of English, miscommunication, misinterpretation, and errors in translation can pose as significant work stressors. Globalisation and ease of travel have resulted in many different industries experiencing an increase in English second language speakers, and this is therefore not an occupational stressor that is necessarily unique to the shipping industry. However, it is in the shipping industry that this stressor can have particularly devastating consequences. The grounding of the Braer oil tanker in 1993 illustrates this point. The oil tanker ran aground following engine failure off the coast of Shetland, spilling 85 0000

tonnes of crude oil and causing widespread devastation to marine life (Davies & Topping, 1997). While poor weather conditions were largely blamed for the grounding of the vessel, full transcripts of the time leading up to the accident show that language difficulties were experienced during several telephone conversations prior to and during the accident (Horck, 2006).

2.3.3.7 Merchant marine culture

While merchant marine culture contributes to the cultural diversity on board, it is included as a section on its own. The reason for this is that merchant marine culture, conceptualised by Carol-Dekker (2018), consists of a complex blend of three different components: *organisational culture, safety culture and ship culture*. These three cultural components interact and encircle all other cultures found on board in the various nationalities represented. Carol-Dekker (2018), who has conducted extensive research into the topic of culture on board, defines merchant marine culture as:

> *''A group of men or women, who speak the symbolic seafarers' language, and who can narrate their experiences through social interaction regardless of age, culture, gender, race, and/or nationality. This camaraderie is formed by their seafaring experiences. The social cohesion can occur through physical or social interaction or through social media''* (p. 12).

Carol-Dekker (2018) goes on to argue that navigating this environment is essential for the psychological health and safety of the seafarer. Considering the interaction between the different cultural components of merchant marine culture sheds further light on this argument. For example, organisational culture can interact negatively with ship culture. In other words, the organisational culture, which regulates the ship, can create an *us vs them* scenario, in which the crew does not feel heard or understood by the organisation for which they work. This could easily result in animosity and resentment in seafarers (Carol-Dekker, 2018). Another example is the interaction of safety culture with ship culture. For a ship to run smoothly and safely, good communication and teamwork (components of safety culture) are vital (Bhargava, 2013). Nautilus International (2010), in their report on bullying and harassment in the maritime industry, note that if organisational policies are not enforced, the ship can easily become an unfriendly environment for those who do not fit into the typically male-dominated ship culture. This may have a negative impact on ship culture, as cohesiveness and teamwork amongst the crew could be jeopardised.

2.3.3.8 Cultural perspectives on mental health

Difference in cultural perspectives forms an occupational stressor that plays an obvious role in seafarer mental health. Cultural understandings and perceptions of stress and mental health differ from country to country. In Southeast Asia for example, mental health disorders are considered mysterious illnesses and are often the subject of fear (Seyle, Fernandez, Dimitrevich & Bahri, 2018). Seeing a mental health professional for treatment in this region of the world is often met with trepidation because of the fear of being labelled or stigmatised as being mentally ill (Jagosh et al., 2017).

In addition, seafarers are known not to ask for help owing to a culture of independence and self-reliance that characterises their work experience (Jagosh et al., 2017). A recent study investigated mental illness claims data made to a large international marine insurance provider during the years 2007 to 2015. Findings indicated that the mental illness claim rate is low, and researchers attributed this to seafarers potentially having a high threshold for claims reporting (Lefkowitz & Slade, 2019).

2.3.3.9 Piracy and threat of piracy

For the maritime industry, piracy is a real and very serious global problem. The International Maritime Bureau reports that since 2006, there have been more than 3 000 pirate attacks worldwide (IMO, 2010; 2015). This number is an underestimation as researchers believe that only one third of pirate attacks are actually reported (Seyle et al., 2018).

Piracy has several detrimental consequences. First, piracy costs money. In 2010, it was estimated that piracy costs the world economy up to $30 billion a year (Fu, Ng & Lau, 2010). Second, piracy and even just the threat of piracy are occupational stressors that can cause significant physical and psychological harm to an individual. Seafarer victims of piracy endure extreme physical and psychological abuse at the hands of their captors (Abila & Tang, 2014). Some of the worst examples of abuse include experiencing the constant threat of death, witnessing the deaths of fellow captives, being held at gunpoint throughout capture, and even being used as a human shield (Abila & Tang, 2014). Food deprivation, torture, abuse and isolated confinement have been widely reported (Abila & Tang, 2014). While these are worst case scenarios, perhaps even more pervasive is the fear that seafarers experience when travelling through high-risk areas. The 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5), which is used by clinicians to diagnose and classify mental disorders, considers even the threat of death and serious injury as one of the criteria needed to meet a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD (APA, 2013). Though the hypothetical threat might

not necessarily meet Criterion A of PTSD, it is clearly a significant stressor. The threat of piracy could have a significant negative impact on the mental health of those who work at sea, even though this is something many seafarers will never personally experience.

Concern has also been expressed about the level of training that seafarers have with regards to piracy and its threat. Researchers who investigated piracy discovered that almost all the seafarers they interviewed felt that they had failed to receive adequate mental preparation to deal with travelling through known zones of piracy (Garfinkle, 2000).

2.3.3.10 Deleterious work environment

Seafaring is one of the most dangerous professions in the world involving high rates of fatality in an extremely strenuous and complex environment (Zevallos et al., 2014). Just taking the physical environment of the ship into consideration, while ignoring the unpredictable ocean, can result in the identification of a long list of factors that result in the work environment forming a significant work stressor for the seafarer. Factors that have been proven to take their toll include vibration caused by the ship engine, exposure to harmful chemicals, and noise (Hystad & Eid, 2016).

Seafarers are exposed to a high degree of whole-body vibration or WBV, which has been demonstrated among other populations such as truck or tractor drivers to cause spinal problems (Jensen & Jepsen, 2014). WBV has also been found to increase both physical and mental fatigue in long distance truck drivers (Du et al., 2018). This has not been assessed in seafarers, however. In addition to the vibrations, acceleration (such as increasing speed or movements of the ship through choppy seas) can pose pressure on the spine by increasing the need to stabilise oneself using compensating muscles to do so; this could cause muscle strain and back pain (Jensen & Jepsen, 2014). Another work environment risk factor includes the exposure to harmful chemicals. Engine room crew members, for example, are exposed to asbestos, soot, and oils, with deck crew members exposed to diesel engine exhaust fumes (Forsell et al., 2015). Lastly, noise can have an adverse impact on the seafarer. The noise of the ship's engine has been measured to be an average level of 65dB(A) which is slightly louder than a normal conversation (Jepsen, Zhao & van Leeuwen, 2015). This level of constant noise is assumed by researchers to have an adverse effect on seafarers (Melbye & Carter, 2017). Indeed, attempting to sleep while others are conversing, which can be an extremely frustrating experience, makes this assumption quite plausible. The psychological impact of noise pollution has been the subject of several studies. For example, Alimohammadi, Kanrash, Abolaghasemi, Afrazandeh & Rahmani (2018) investigated the noise levels experienced by workers in the Iranian automotive industry. They found that exposure to noise increased the

incidence of tension and inappropriate behaviour associated with aggression. This was also found to be the case amongst printer workers (Nassiri et al., 2011). Noise has also been found to alter neurochemical activity (specifically serotonin and dopamine) causing psychiatric disorders such as anxiety disorders and depression (Tavakoli, Ahmadi & Tavakoli, 2013).

2.3.3.11 Feeling trapped and bored

The total institution of the ship creates a unique work environment. Whether on or off duty, crew members' movements are restricted to the setting of the ship which is a confined space in which seafarers live and work (Simons, 2013). Research has found that the cumulative impact of working and living in a confined environment can take its toll on crew members (Simons, 2013). The seafarer faces an unusual environment on board a ship. Lamvick (2012) explains:

> *"A ship is, in short, an extreme and an abnormal place to be. It is almost impossible to find a corresponding society elsewhere"* (p. 25).

Lamvick (2012) explains why this environment is so abnormal – first, it is constantly in motion as it is floating; second, it is populated by very few people, mostly men; third, there is very limited space on board with little space for relaxation and recreation; and fourth, the social organisation is extremely rigid and hierarchical. This unusual environment has been described by some seafarers as akin to a prison (Lamvick, 2012). There is nowhere to go at the end of the day, and limited options for down time. This creates further problems. Research shows that seafarers are prone to both depression and boredom because their working conditions are so monotonous (Jegaden, Menaheze, Lucas, Loddé & Dewitte, 2019).

2.3.3.12 Accidents onboard

Apart from a dangerous work environment, seafaring is a hazardous occupation, with the constant presence of physical danger related to one's duties that could lead to permanent disability or even death. Despite the industry making huge strides in health and safety over the last 100 years, data shows that the relative risk of an accident occurring in the UK shipping industry, compared with the general British workforce, was similar in 2001 to that in 1961 (Slišković & Penezić, 2016). A study conducted on Polish ships between 1960 and 2000 investigated work-site casualties. Findings indicated that 61% of deaths were caused by accidents on board (Jaremin, 2005). Twenty years later, findings are similar – recent studies confirm that accidents and work-related accidents are the leading cause of death for seafarers (Jagosh et al., 2017).

Seafarers are also often primary targets for criminal accountability (Jagosh et al., 2017). On paper, if an accident results in marine pollution, a certain level of accountability falls to the ship manager ashore. However, there have been cases where the ship managers and owners have managed to distance themselves from the master seafarer, as well as any legal prosecution, when an accident has occurred. An example of this is the Exxon Valdez accident in 1989. The ship, transporting crude oil, had been altered to chart a slightly different course than normal to avoid icebergs. The third mate, who was at the helm at the time, failed to manoeuvre the vessel adequately. The vessel left the shipping lane and collided with a shallow reef. The master of the ship was fined $50 000 and sentenced to 1 000 hours of community service, while no one from Exxon faced charges of any kind (Jagosh et al., 2017).

2.3.3.13 Gender discrimination and sexual harassment

Several misconceptions about the role of women seafarers continue to pervade the shipping industry, such as the work is too difficult for women, women are not brave enough to work offshore, and that lack of physical strength and stamina in comparison to men mean women are not useful in parts of the ship like the engine room (Thomas, 2004). A study conducted in 2004 collected data on the employment of female seafarers in the form of interviews with women seafarers, human resource managers of shipping companies, and international regulatory bodies and trade unions in over thirty countries across the globe. Findings indicate that the historical notion of “women’s work” persists in the maritime industry (Thomas, 2004). Women are associated with caring and expression of feeling, neither of which “fit” in an industry that values physical strength, physical stamina, courage and masculinity to get the job done (Kitada, 2010). These negative views come from both European and Asian countries (Thomas, 2004). Qualitative data collected by Thomas (2004) indicates that women believe they must perform much better and work much harder than their male counterparts to be viewed as competent. This is confirmed by Dragomir and Surugiu (2013) who note in their findings (collected in the form of qualitative interviews with women seafarers) that while most men report it takes them only a few hours to be accepted by their crew mates, it typically takes over a few days for women to be able to achieve the same level of acceptance.

Sexual harassment is another issue aboard ships (Dragomir & Surugiu, 2013) and it is a complicated one. The sexual harassment reported by women seafarers in the study conducted by Thomas (2004) took many forms, some of which included coarse joking, persistent sexual invitations, and contact of a physical nature. Thomas (2004) goes on to note that in the “rigidly hierarchical and isolated environment of the ship such behaviours could be particularly difficult for the women involved” (p. 33). Taking this into consideration, it is likely that gender discrimination could pose as a significant occupational stressor for women seafarers.

2.4 Occupational well-being

2.4.1 Introduction

Occupational or employee well-being refers to an individual's experience of both physical and psychological health, job satisfaction and success at work (Rahimnia & Sharifirad, 2015). This will be the focus of this thesis, rather than occupational stress, and a full conceptualisation of this term will be presented in Chapter four. It will be shown in the literature review that research on occupational well-being in the maritime industry is lacking significantly, which justified the decision for the focus of this thesis being occupational well-being.

2.4.2 Moving from occupational stress to occupational well-being

Furthermore, there are two reasons rooted in current research that justify the move from focusing on occupational stress to a focus on occupational well-being. First, according to Cotton and Hart (2003), the stressors and strain approach to occupational health has dominated occupational health research for the past three or four decades. This approach is characterised by the assumption that stress arises when certain work factors contribute to poor physical and psychological health (Beehr, 1995). Cotton and Hart (2003) went on to argue that this assumption has fostered a ''narrow focus on discrete adverse work experiences and negative employee emotional responses'' (p. 118). This argument regarding occupational health (both physical and psychological) is in line with Gable and Haidt's (2005) argument of psychology in general, which is that the key processes that contribute to the flourishing of people and groups are neglected and ignored. Therefore, the focus of occupational well-being in the broader framework of occupational health represents an important step towards the field of positive psychology becoming more influential in the workplace.

Second, the focus on well-being instead of stress in the workplace has attracted the attention of researchers in recent times, with well-being at work increasingly recognised as an important factor in occupational health (see Peccei, 2004; Beehr, 2019). This is because research on occupational stress has shown that coping strategies and social support (in other words, strategies to boost well-being) have a buffering effect on stress and play a role in protecting mental health at work (Singh, Gupta & Mishra, 2021). Researchers and stakeholders have, therefore, emphasised the need to identify other strategies that act as buffers to stress.

Taking these two reasons into consideration, as well as the lack of well-being literature pertaining to seafarers, which will be proven in the next chapter, focus of the thesis is the occupational well-being of seafarers, rather than occupational stress in the industry.

2.4.3 Occupational well-being in the maritime sector

Carotenuto et al. (2013) were among the first researchers to emphasise positive well-being as a primary construct in seafarer mental health, which the researchers describe as “the satisfaction from working life and interest in everyday activities” (p. 218). However, other researchers have argued that there is a myriad of different models of occupational well-being with researchers failing to agree on one definition of the term. As noted, Chapter four will go into detail regarding these various definitions and models of occupational well-being, offering a conceptualisation of the term as it pertains to seafarers.

2.5 Conclusion to chapter

Some of the work stressors mentioned in this section are unique to the shipping industry, such as lack of shore leave, merchant marine culture and piracy. These are in addition to common work stressors that people in the general sector experience, such as interpersonal conflict, role ambiguity or organisational change, many of which have been proven to cause mental health problems. Evidence shows that even in the general workforce, employees are unaware of the effectiveness and importance of coping mechanisms and well-being strategies to deal with occupational stress (Burman & Goswami, 2018). It seems that even if structures are put into place to reduce stress in the workplace, employees may not be accessing the support available or using proper tools to reduce stress. Coping with occupational stressors (or the lack of coping) in the merchant navy has received attention primarily in the last two decades (see for example Horck, 2006 & 2008; Carotenuto et al., 2012 and Carol-Dekker & Sultan, 2016) with little research investigating whether seafarers, as with the general population, are aware of the effectiveness and importance of coping mechanisms to deal with occupational stress and boost occupational well-being. It is thus no wonder that urgent calls have been made recently for regulatory shipping bodies, shipping companies and other stakeholders to reduce the impact of mental health-related stressors on the individual seafarer. The next section of this chapter will analyse and critique occupational stress and mental health in the maritime industry specifically, to expand understanding on this topic and identify gaps in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW PART I
SEAFARER MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

For the secrets in the currents of the seas have never been divulged, not even to the most erudite researchers.

Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 922)*

3.1 Introduction to chapter

The literature review has been divided into two parts. The first part, included in this chapter, critiques over two decades of research on the issue of seafarer mental health and well-being. The second part, included in chapter four, will review literature on positive psychology, the rationale for which will become clearer in this chapter. This chapter will start by looking at the various factors that could add complexity to conducting research in the seafaring population. This section will follow with a critique of the literature, which has been organised by date, starting with an analysis of the mainly quantitative research which appeared at the beginning of the century and then going on to discuss the qualitative research that started to follow. The critique will then narrow its focus on specific issues, namely suicide, gender, and the South African seafarer. It will end with a discussion of the latest research done in the last five years, divided into two sections, namely pre-pandemic and the pandemic.

3.2 Researching seafarer mental health

Conducting research into the mental health of seafarers is complex and there are numerous factors that cause this. One of these is culture. Different cultures view depression differently. For example, Fernandez, Seyle and Simon (2018) analysed the conceptualisation of depression in Filipino seafarers and found that it presents slightly differently than Western cultures. For example, feeling disconnected from other people was found to be a key factor in their conceptualisation of depression, based on the Filipino belief that one's self concept includes *the other* (Fernandez et al., 2018). This is different to Western culture that does not necessarily view the other as being such an integral component to one's self concept. Because of this, research that is conducted from a Western perspective into the mental health of seafarers from the Philippines might fail to identify depression in Filipino seafarers if the researchers are not intentionally looking for this quality as a symptom of depression. The same may apply to other, typically seafaring countries such as India and China.

A second factor that complicates the matter is that the suicide rate in seafarers, which is normally a fair indication of the mental health of a population, is considered inaccurate. This is because, while accidents and suicides on board are duly reported, Iverson (2011) argues

that the suicide rate assumed by the industry cannot be trusted, since it is often unclear as to whether a seafarer has jumped overboard intentionally or fallen to his death accidentally. The same applies to the repatriation rate of seafarers with poor mental health, which should also be a fair indication of how seafarers are doing in this area. Bell and Jensen (2009) analysed repatriation documents of almost 52 000 Filipino seafarers who had worked for over 200 days at sea from January 2014 to December 2016. They found that less than 1% were repatriated for issues related to mental health. This appears to be low considering findings by Lefkowitz and Slade (2019) who found that in a sample of 1 572 international seafarers, which included Filipinos, 25% had scores suggesting clinical depression, 17% demonstrated symptoms of clinical anxiety, and 20% had suicidal ideation.

Another layer of complexity to researching the mental health of seafarers relates to fitness for duty. Fitness for duty is an essential prerequisite for the job. Some researchers argue that seafarers may fear disclosing mental health problems as they view the disclosure as a threat to re-employment (Jezuwska & Iversen, 2012). While there is a difference between disclosing for a work health screening programme and disclosing for the purpose of research, it could be argued that this adds to the complexity of gathering accurate data on the topic of mental health in the industry. Dr Illona Denisenko, a medical doctor, explained her first-hand experience of treating seafarers in her address at the II International Congress on Maritime, Tropical, and Hyperbaric Medicine in 2012:

> *"Seafarers often think of the doctor as a monster in a white robe, who is trying to prevent them from going to sea to get new contracts and send money to their families. It is really hard for them to get the right picture. Sometimes you should be like an inquisitor from medieval times, who tries to get the truth from poor prisoners. It is quite hard to break the ice. It can really take some time when a doctor tries to explain that finding limitations is not the main aim for an examining physician; the seafarer's health is" (as reported in Jezuwska & Iversen, 2012, p. 109).*

In rebuttal to what Denisenko is saying here, Rozanov (2020) posited that the reluctance amongst seafarers to disclose mental health difficulties is a systemic problem, caused by the fact that medical staff remain focused only on physical health during medical check-ups. Rozanov (2020) suggested that seafarers do not report mental health issues owing to lack of attention from medical staff, suggesting that there is a desire in seafarers to disclose this information. Regardless of the exact reason, there does appear to be support for the

hypothesis that some seafarers may not be disclosing mental health difficulties during routine medical check-ups.

A final factor contributing to the complexity of conducting research into seafarer mental health is what McVeigh et al. (2019) note as critical for researchers to observe. They caution against extrapolating data from one study to another as the maritime industry is so diverse with a myriad of different states, nationalities, contract types, employers, and employment practices.

The available evidence suggests that there is a layer of complexity to researching the topic of seafarer mental health, impacted by different cultural perspectives of depression and mental illness, fear of disclosing symptoms of mental illness and uncertainty regarding the accuracy of the assumed suicide and repatriation rates. This complexity was considered in my research. The primary way that this information influenced my thesis was that I went to great lengths to ensure that data collection was done in a manner that was highly ethical, with my priority being protecting the anonymity of the participants.

3.3 Literature review

Prior to the turn of the century, little research focused on the mental health and well-being of seafarers specifically. There appeared to be a stronger focus on the physical aspects of seafaring with noise and climatic conditions on board (Elo, 1985), working environment (Ivergård, 1984), and restricted space and isolation experienced at sea (Vuksanović & Goethe, 2012) highlighted as potential stressors. Ello (1985) also found that lack of appreciation on board was a significant stressor for seafarers at that time. Fatigue was also identified as a concern (Smith, 1981). The suicide rate was not a huge concern, although it did feature in research on seafarers from Hong Kong and Denmark, with illness and accidents forming most reasons cited for deaths on board (see Nielsen, 1999 and Brandt, Kirk, Jensen & Hansen, 1994). Interestingly, the suicide rate among Finnish seafarers was found to be like occupationally active men in the general Finnish population (Wickstrom & Leivonniemi, 1985). In one of the few papers that did discuss mental illness in seafarers specifically, Ross (1977) postulated that mental illness is not caused by seafaring; rather, mental instability is the cause of a seafaring career. The argument here is that it was customary to see “mentally peculiar men drift to a seafaring career” (p. 267). In his paper, Ross (1977) went on to discuss a study of psychiatric inpatients who had reportedly selected seafaring as an occupation to avoid close relationships and responsibilities at home. There is no reference made to this study in his paper, however. Ross (1977) did go on to discuss the social isolation, monotonous work environment, length of voyage, fatigue, and lack of entertainment as problems facing

seafarers. Interestingly, even in 1977, the lack of shore leave was mentioned as a problem, with Ross (1977) explaining that shore leave is vital to provide relief from the monotony of a long trip at sea.

The mental health of seafarers started to generate interest after the US World Trade Centre attacks on the 11 September 2001 (9/11). This catastrophic event has been recognised by the maritime industry as a watershed moment with regards to the well-being of seafarers (Jagosh, Pike, Henderson & Calderón, 2017). This is because of the turning point made in the various customs and security policies at ports around the world. Overnight, seafarers went from being welcomed at port to facing suspicion and fear instead. This both increased ship turnaround times and restricted the movements of seafarers ashore. This had a profound impact on the well-being of seafarers (Jagosh et al., 2017) and for this reason, this literature review will focus on the body of research generated from the turn of this century.

3.3.1 A new century: a focus on physical health

It was in the early 2000s that research on seafarer occupational health started to include mental health, although this remained a very small percentage of research output. For example, Machlalan, Kavanagh and Kay (2012) noted that in the International Maritime Health Journal, between the years 2000 and 2010, 46% of studies covered topics related to disease and physical health problems in the maritime industry, and 38% covered topics related to healthcare access, safety and delivery. Only 10% of research in this journal covered psychological functioning and mental health among seafarers (Machlalan et al., 2012).

Research at the start of the century focused more on physical health as a primary construct rather than mental health. One of these first studies investigated morbidity and homeostasis in forty Chinese seafarers (Gao, Yang & Min, 2000). The content of adrenal cortical hormone in the blood, vital for ensuring homeostasis in the body, was measured at various stages during a four-week voyage, as an indicator of morbidity. These hormone levels were found to be abnormally high in the first two weeks of the voyage. The causative effect of stress on levels of adrenal cortical hormone is known, leading the researchers to conclude that psychological factors caused significant fluctuations in the stress hormone while at sea, thus impacting on the participants' morbidity (Gao et al., 2000). The specific stressors that may have caused the abnormally high hormone levels were not investigated since the study's focus was on homeostasis of the body. A second study by some of the same researchers, however, conducted a few years later, included measures of psychological health as part of its investigation into the manifestation of symptoms of mental health disorders. This was a positive step towards emphasising the role of mental health in seafarers. The immunological

function (by measuring CD4/CD8 cell count) in forty Chinese seafarers at sea, along with their psychological functioning was assessed (Gao, Ping, Rui & Li 2003). Psychological functioning was assessed using a standardised symptom checklist. The CD4/CD8 cell count (and thus the strength of each participant's immune system) degraded significantly during the first half of the voyage, and reduced psychological functioning was also noted during this timeframe. The researchers reported that symptoms of depression and anxiety, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and somatization were common during this time (Gao et al., 2003). Although the samples of both aforementioned studies were quite limited in size and diversity, the results of each were useful in that they highlighted the issue of seafarer mental health quantitatively and in the form of measurable statistics of physiological functioning.

A third study with a sample of Chinese seafarers used the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality test (MMP) to assess the psychological functioning of 293 seafarers before they embarked on a voyage (Zhang, 2004). The results appeared at first quite contradictory to the results of the two studies, although the populations were similar in demographic. The mean scores of depression and somatization on the MMP test were significantly *lower* than those of the general Chinese population. Zhang (2004) concluded that the psychological functioning of these seafarers was generally good. However, emphasis must be placed on the fact that the psychological functioning of the participants was measured *before* the voyage rather than *during* the voyage, potentially substantiating the argument that seafarers experience a great degree of stress on board that impacts their mental health significantly. Further insight into the issue is clearly needed, through the opinions of seafarers themselves. It could also be argued that since the individuals in Zhang's (2004) study were employed, they may have enjoyed some form of status and financial security, which may have contributed positively to their psychological functioning. This could mean that comparing the sample to the general population, some of whom might not be employed or have financial security, might have contributed to the results.

The experience of fatigue onboard became a popular focus of research in the first few years of the 21st century following the publication of the Donaldson Report in 1994 (discussed in the second chapter of this thesis). Most of the studies on seafarer fatigue do not assess the causative effect that physical fatigue has on mental health, highlighting quite a clear gap in the literature, although some studies on seafarer physical health certainly touch on the issue. Most of these are quantitative and cross-sectional in nature. One example is a survey of seafarer fatigue which made use of the Short Form Health Survey (SF 36) that measures degree of general health, and the Profile of Fatigue Related Symptoms (PFRS) (Allen, Burke & Ellis, 2003). Results showed that low scores on the SF 36 (which includes a limited number

of items on mental health) correlated with high scores on the PFRS. The researchers also noted that the development, implementation, and evaluation of strategies (such as training) to address fatigue is crucial.

Poor physical health and its relationship to poor mental health was further explored in a study conducted on Lithuanian and Latvian seafarers in 2006 (Sąlyga & Juozulynas, 2006). Depression was identified as a factor that related significantly to the occurrence of psycho-emotional stress on board. Prognostic factors linked to psycho-emotional stress were also identified, namely the seafarer's self-evaluation of their health status and physical capability. Findings also suggested that psycho-emotional stress was particularly influenced by work on the ship that resulted in increased visual strain. This study emphasised both subjective and objective physical health in seafarers. It can be argued that these studies on the relationship between physical and mental health pose a chicken and egg scenario - in seafarers, does poor physical health cause poor mental health, or does poor mental health cause poor physical health? Another option to consider is whether the interaction of these factors is far more complicated. While further research is needed to clarify this, these studies highlight the possibility that the relationship between factors influencing seafarer mental health is complex and multidimensional. It is argued that, to address this complexity, assumptions based on correlations between certain constructs must be substantiated by the opinions and experiences of seafarers themselves.

Another early study on the topic of physical fatigue and mental health produced very interesting results that were quite secondary to the main purpose of the study. Ellis, Allen and Burke (2003) investigated the impact of noise on a vessel and its relationship to quality of sleep amongst 177 seafarers of varying nationality. While no correlation was found between the two constructs, what did emerge was the impact that noise has on levels of seafarer anxiety. Initial findings indicated a significant difference in degree of anxiety in seafarers on low-level noise vessels versus seafarers on high-level noise vessels, with seafarers reporting *lower* anxiety levels on noisier vessels (Ellis et al., 2003). This was unexpected since a noisy work environment on board has recently been highlighted as a possible occupational stressor (Mellbye & Carter, 2017). However, multiple regression analysis shed light on this apparent contradiction when it suggested that the variation in levels of anxiety was more a factor of voyage length rather than overall levels of noise. Ellis et al. (2003) concluded from this that seafarer mood and mental health offshore are influenced by a multitude of factors, again emphasising the complexity of the issue. These findings also highlight that isolating only one factor to assess its impact on mental health might be misleading. This study also develops the

claim that qualitative research, garnering opinions and narratives from seafarers themselves, would serve to enrich quantitative research on the issue.

The study by Ellis et al. (2003) was also interesting in that no correlation between sleep quality and noise was found. The assumption that the noise of the ship would impact sleep quality (and therefore, potentially, mental health) is plausible. Ships are noisy work environments. Tamura et al. (2002) investigated the issue of sleep and noise by looking into the habituation of sleep in relation to the sound of a ship's engine. This was measured objectively by actigraphy (a non-invasive way of measuring sleep cycles) and subjectively with a sleep questionnaire. The experimental nights were spent with four seafarers being exposed to the noise of a cargo ship's engine, which has been measured to be approximately 65dB(A). This is about the noise level of a normal conversation. It was found that exposure to this level of noise can have *some* adverse effect on sleep, but most seafarers become habituated to the noise (Tamura et al., 2002). Interestingly, the slightly adverse impact on sleep was indicated subjectively and not objectively. In other words, this was evident only on the self-report sleep questionnaires, and not using actigraphy. The researchers concluded that the subjective experiences of sleep (for example how one feels one slept that night, or how refreshed one feels upon waking) are impacted by the noise of the ship, more than whether one was asleep or not. While the researchers did not link these findings to mental health, the study does point to how sleep could be impacted by a seafarer's frame of mind. Again, the multidimensional aspect to mental health in seafarers is emphasised.

This section has developed the claim that seafarers experience occupational stress and that this stress has a physiological impact. It has been shown that seafarers suffer from a variety of physical effects from their time at sea such as low adrenal cortical hormone levels, increasing levels of fatigue, degrading immunological functioning and poor physiological functioning in general. Clearly, the stress related to seafaring takes its toll on the body. The next section will show how the industry started to focus on the issue of mental health specifically, at times through qualitative data methods, and include other populations related to seafarers, such as seafarer spouses, in the research.

3.3.2 A move to qualitative research and related populations

As noted, quantitative research when it comes to seafarer mental health dominates the industry. However, some qualitative research into the issue began around the start of the 21st century, lending support to the argument that occupational stress is an issue seafarers must navigate. For example, Sampson and Zhao (2003) conducted a comprehensive study which involved on-board data collection by researchers who sailed with seafarers on 14 voyages

averaging four weeks each. Interviews and observations formed part of the data collection. The study investigated the importance of communication on board, both for job-related purposes and for social interaction, revealing that social interaction on board often involves the use of jokes and joking strategies. Sampson and Zhao (2003) emphasised that joking is risky amongst multinational crews, where culture could influence whether the joke is understood. They noted that the inability to participate in social banter and joking could result in the seafarer feeling isolated, arguing that the industry has been slow to realise the importance of social interaction amongst multinational crews. Another qualitative study, this time ethnographic in nature, used in-depth interviews as a method of data collection (Sampson & Wu, 2003). The investigation into the myriad of ways that technology has changed life on board revealed that the seafarer's world has become "a remote one, largely inaccessible and imaginary" (p. 149). In their interviews, many of the participants highlighted the extent to which technology and automation have resulted in faster turnaround time at port and limited shore leave. The researchers concluded that this means the vessel has become more like a prison than ever before. These two studies are noteworthy as they illustrate the stressors seafarers may face in their day to day lives in a unique environment that has changed significantly in the last few decades.

Another study published around this time was entitled, *The Intermittent Husband* (Hubinger, Parker & Clavarino, 2002). It investigated the levels of depression amongst 35 Australian seafarer wives using a mixed methods design. An obvious weakness of the study were the heteronormative and gendered assumptions about work roles in the industry. Nonetheless, the data is useful in developing a more holistic understanding of stressors in the industry and the link to mental health. The results from the quantitative component of the study, which made use of two standardised measures of psychological well-being, indicated that 9% of respondents were depressed, in comparison to normative rates of depression indicated by the researchers as being 3% of the adult population at the time. The researchers concluded that the frequent partings and reunions that are inevitable with this kind of work manifest in the form of symptoms of depression in seafarer spouses, citing several studies with similar findings to substantiate this conclusion. It must be noted, however, that the similar studies used to substantiate their argument were quite outdated by the time this research was conducted and published in 2003 (examples of studies used included Morrice & Taylor, 1978; Taylor, Morrice, Clark & McCann, 1985 and Rigg & Cosgrove, 1994). This, and the small sample size of the study (n=35) could be considered limitations and thus the researchers noted that the data should be interpreted with caution. Qualitative data, however, which consisted of questionnaire responses analysed for common themes, substantiated the quantitative findings. The participants reported their feelings of stress and depression about the home-

and-away nature of their husbands' work (Hubinger et al., 2002). A substantial number of participants felt that there was a lack of emotional support in their lives (Hubinger et al., 2002). Since this would inevitably play a role in the well-being of the seafarer, the researchers went on to recommend family support groups, the elimination of last-minute roster changes, family use of company counselling support services and an educational approach to work-related family issues. Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003) were also able to identify several ways to mitigate the negative consequences of seafaring on families by collecting qualitative data through in-depth interviews with seafarer partners. Factors such as continuous employment (as opposed to employment by voyage), opportunities for partners and families to sail, and shorter trips were identified as being particularly helpful. This study also has implications for my own research as it emphasised the usefulness of qualitative methods in identifying factors to mitigate stress and increase well-being.

A similar study, although only quantitative in nature but with a much larger sample size, was conducted a few years later, generating quite contrasting findings. The study consisted of questionnaires addressing topics such as subjective health, psychological well-being, marital satisfaction, and social support (Ulven, Omdal, Herlov-Nielsen, Irgens & Dah, 2007). The participant group consisted of 192 seafarer spouses, and a control group of 45 spouses of workers in industries ashore. Interestingly, no difference was found between mental health in seafarer spouses and the mental health of the spouses in the control group (Ulven et al., 2007). What did emerge from the findings was the role of emotional support – seafarer spouses reported having less emotional support than the control group. The same was reported by seafarer wives in the study conducted by Hubinger and Clavarino (2002). Ulven et al. (2007) concluded that being alone at home for weeks at a time might exaggerate shore-side problems, increasing the need for social support. Considering research findings of a more general nature that indicate that spousal depression has a significant impact on an individual's mental health (see for example Benezaon & Coyne, 2000; Gabriel, Bodenmann & Beach, 2016 and Singh, Sharma & Chavan, 2019) it can be argued that the same might be seen in the lives of seafarers. It is argued that the added factor of spousal depression that is potentially caused or exacerbated by the seafarer's absence from home, adds a layer of complexity to the issue of seafarer mental health and well-being. A third study including seafarer spouses was conducted in 2012. It was completely qualitative in nature, making use of patterned interviews (Yur & Nas, 2012). The 15 spouses mentioned something very common to their seafaring partners – longing for children when at sea. It was found that among this small sample, most of the seafarers, according to their spouses, had experienced bouts of longing intensely for children while at sea that had resulted in the consideration of looking into employment opportunities on land (Your & Nas, 2012).

These three studies on seafarer spouses are mentioned because of their significance to one of the overarching themes that appears in much of the literature on this topic – this being that mental health in the maritime industry is considerably multi-faceted, with many components that must be considered through a variety of research methods. In addition to this, the qualitative information that was generated in these studies is very useful in that it is able to capture expressive information not conveyed in quantitative data about values, beliefs, feelings, and motivations that may be experienced among seafarers, for example, the experience of longing for one's child while at sea. These studies have also substantiated the argument that there is clearly a place for both quantitative and qualitative studies to enhance our understanding of the psychological impact of seafaring.

A population also differing slightly from working seafarers Is seafaring students. Very little research has been conducted with this population regarding mental health, apart from a few quantitative studies, highlighting a gap in the literature. One of these studies made use of a descriptive survey research design. The standardised Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was answered by 707 maritime students enrolled at a maritime college in the Philippines (Arceňo, 2015). In essence, the study involved observing and describing the Internet use of students, using the IAT as a method of data collection, with the researcher questioning whether Internet addiction is a concern amongst maritime students. The data generated was able to provide further insight into issues related to the psychological well-being of the students. Findings indicated that the students were carrying an extremely heavy study load and had very little time to indulge in too much Internet usage (Arceňo, 2015). They were also experiencing a significant amount of pressure to achieve results high enough to ensure they would secure an apprenticeship on an internationally sailing vessel, and pass the maritime board exam (Arceňo, 2015). While it seems from this that these seafarer students are quite well-accustomed to dealing with pressure, it could also point to a need in the industry to ensure that students receive proper psychological support to deal with the pressures of their time at maritime college.

Research conducted in the Philippines highlighted the importance of educating maritime students in mental health *before* they begin their careers at sea. The Student Stress Survey (SSS) was used to gather data from 120 randomly selected maritime students at a maritime college (Saile et al., 2017). Interviews with the participants revealed that most of them felt that they were comfortable with their present levels of stress, but their coping mechanisms are noteworthy. Of the respondents, 51% reported that they coped with stress by overeating. Almost 30% of respondents reported becoming hostile, unfriendly, and antagonistic towards

others when feeling stressed. While the respondents indicated several effective ways of dealing with stress as well (such as listening to music) these findings are certainly concerning and highlight potential gaps in knowledge regarding stress management. Arguably because of deficits in stress management, a study on Lithuanian maritime students indicated that this population is also at risk for depression and anxiety (Adruskiene, Barseviciene & Varoneckas, 2015). Out of a sample of 393 students, 10% were found to have symptoms pointing to mild to moderate depression; 35% had mild to moderate anxiety; and 9% had severe anxiety. In total, this means that 54% of students showed clinical symptoms of a mental health disorder. Over half of these students (45%) had poor sleeping practices. The researchers argued that these findings demonstrate that maritime students view their future careers as highly stressful. The researchers also noted that higher rates of depression and anxiety were found in third and fourth year students than in first or second year students, potentially substantiating the argument that the symptoms of poor mental health were caused by a looming career at sea (Adruskiene et al., 2015). In a very promising study by Jing (2010) that looked specifically into taking care of maritime students on a psychological level, a class of maritime students in China attended group counselling sessions and classes every two weeks for a year. Students were educated on mental health and encouraged to explore issues related to mental health through discussion and introspection. The students in the experimental group showed significant positive changes on several indices of the Symptom Checklist 90 and the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire. Based on these findings, Jing (2010) stressed the critical need for maritime students to be educated about mental health and provided with adequate psychosocial support. Maritime students are often young adults, many in their late adolescence, and at a critical and vulnerable stage in their development. While facing a career with high levels of occupational stress, they must be taught coping strategies to ensure their mental health is not negatively impacted.

The role of the Internet abroad was also a focus area of discussion around this time. In a study of over 3 000 seafarers using surveys and semi-structured interviews, Kahveci (2007) found that only 10% of participants agreed with the following statement: *Aboard my vessel seafarers have adequate access to means of communication with home*. While access to a satellite phone was not a problem for most seafarers in the study, the location of the phone (i.e., on the bridge and in the ship's office) prevented many of them from being able to talk to their families in private. Kahveci (2007) reported that the participants overwhelmingly stressed to him that access to onboard e-mail facilities would improve their well-being.

This section has described the issue of seafarer well-being in more depth, outlining some of the qualitative research on the topic, as well as research on populations linked to seafarers.

All these studies develop the claim that seafarers are negatively impacted by the stressors they face on board, both physically and psychologically, while at the same time introducing the idea that their families also suffer. The next section will go on to illustrate how the industry started taking positive steps at this time towards addressing mental health.

3.3.3 Taking stock and making changes in 2010

A new decade started with researchers seeming to pause and take stock of what had been discovered, with several reviews of the last decade of research published around this time. Most of these reviews called for psychological health to become more of a focus area in the industry, along with the conducting of more qualitative research (see reviews by Carotenuto et al., 2012; Iverson, 2011; 2012; and McLachlan et al., 2012). A call was also made for the creation of specific psycho-education interventions to educate seafarers about mental health, as well as rigorous investigation into the impact of these interventions (see Iverson, 2011; 2012 and Carotenuto et al., 2012).

The industry also started reporting a few noticeable changes with regards to management of seafarer mental health and associated factors. For example, Main and Chambers (2015) recruited 50 maritime pilots who responded to a modified version of a standardised questionnaire that is normally used with aviation pilots. This questionnaire assessed overall fatigue and management thereof before and during a shift. As expected, the results indicated that fatigue has a significant impact on maritime pilots' cognitive and emotional functioning. Interestingly, and unlike aviation pilots, these maritime pilots reported utilising sufficient coping strategies to deal with fatigue (Main & Chambers, 2015). The results of this study could potentially point to progress in the industry regarding the management of fatigue.

Another study substantiating that there has been at least increased awareness of the importance of mental health in the industry evaluated the suitability of the Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWBI) questionnaire amongst a sample of 162 seafarers (Carotenuto, 2013). Findings indicated that the evidence based PGWBI is a practical self-reporting tool for assessing psychological well-being in this population. The researchers advocated its use by shipping companies (Carotenuto et al., 2013). In an industry that, just a few years ago, did not appear to realise the critical role of mental health, it is extremely encouraging to see shipping companies being urged to use evidence-based tools to assess psychological well-being. Another noteworthy point regarding this study was that it was one of the first to emphasise well-being as a primary construct in seafarers, which the researchers described as "the satisfaction from working life and interest in everyday activities" (p. 218). This is contrary to many studies done on the issue of seafarer mental health up until this time,

which addressed mental health problems. From the lens of positive psychology, the researchers were able to identify several factors that could improve well-being, albeit using data that initially appeared quite contradictory to the majority of research on the issue. The overall stress index amongst the sample of seafarers was found to be quite low, with only 3% of the sample affected by severe stress, clearly in contrast to what other studies had found regarding seafarer stress levels, and what would be expected from a study on seafarer stress. Carotenuto et al. (2013) noted that this may have been because all 162 seafarers were employed by the same shipping company, and that the shipping company's attention to onboard conditions had resulted in the higher levels of well-being, and thus lower levels of stress, amongst their crew. Nonetheless, the study was useful in that it identified factors found to improve well-being, which included onboard leisure activities, availability of web communication, and a clear system of distance counselling and support were identified as being central to the healthy well-being of the sample. The findings of this study lend support to the idea of approaching mental health issues with a positive psychology lens. Practical strategies that boost well-being are certainly what the industry needs to start taking positive steps towards considering the human element to shipping.

Several other studies conducted at this time also showed mixed findings, perhaps highlighting again the complexity of the issue. For example, some researchers argued that the low repatriation rate related to mental health problems (in other words, the low rate of seafarers returning home from sea prematurely specifically because of mental health problems) showed that there was an improvement in the maritime industry in seafarer well-being. The repatriation rate of a sample of 388 963 seafarers from the Philippines was evaluated over five years (Abaya, Roldan, Ongchangco, Ronquillo-Sarmiento & Sarmiento, 2015). Of the sample, 1.7% had been repatriated, with only 1.8% of these repatriations due to psychiatric or psychological issues. Abaya et al. (2015) argued that this shows that it is only a small number of seafarers who become mentally or emotionally troubled enough to be returned home from sea, and thus the issue is not a major concern in the industry. However, in response to this, it could be argued that the stigma in the industry regarding mental health makes it difficult for seafarers who are in distress to alert anyone to their distress. A second hypothesis is that clinical depression and clinical anxiety can present along with the ability to perform at work. A seafarer who is struggling with poor mental health may be able to get away with working from shift to shift without anyone knowing his mental health is poor. Again, the need to consider the opinions of seafarers themselves on this issue is highlighted, to clarify these hypotheses.

Shi, Zeng, Wang, Wang and Huang (2015) note that most mental health assessment and research in the seafarer population is conducted via self-report screening measures. It is

argued that this is a considerable limitation in the research, as the stigma about mental health might prevent seafarers from completing these screening measures accurately and with full disclosure. Because there is an absence of reliable literature on the topic, there is no baseline for what can be considered 'normal' levels of well-being for seafarers. A recent study in the field of neuropsychology was able to establish a baseline of sorts in its proposal of an early warning tool to identify mental sub-health (Shi et al., 2015). Mental sub-health is a status of mental health manifesting in unexplained psychological symptoms that are not severe enough to warrant a diagnosis (Shi, Zeng, Wang, Wang & Huang, 2015). Research shows that people with mental sub-health show abnormality of spontaneous neural activity in a part of the brain called the default mode network (Shi et al., 2015). A sample of 79 seafarers, all of whom showed a mild form of mental dysfunction such as depression, anxiety or obsession on the Symptom Checklist 90, underwent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) analyses of the brain. The analyses showed abnormal activity in the default mode network of the brain of each participant. At the same time, a mentally healthy control group of 74 seafarers showed normal default mode network neural activity (Shi et al., 2015). The researchers concluded that fMRI analysis could be a useful, quantitative tool in the early detection of mental disorders in seafarers and be used to establish a baseline.

This section has shown that during this time there was growing awareness, and some improvements, into the issue of seafarer well-being. An analysis of studies examining aspects of seafarer wellness between 2006 and 2016 substantiates this argument (Jagosh, Pike, Henderson & Calderón, 2017). The analysis indicated that there has been growing awareness of the psychological dimension to seafaring with the researchers noting that the reason for this is that seafarer well-being has been reframed in terms of consequences for mistakes in performance and the resulting economic loss (Jagosh et al., 2017). They go on to argue that this has created more space for discussion about mental health by shipping companies who are financially invested in the industry. This could be a helpful factor to consider in the discussion of mental health with stakeholders in the industry.

The next section will discuss specific factors that play a role in seafarer mental health, such a piracy, the threat thereof, the impact of being away from home, and gender discrimination. It is certainly clear from the emergence of these factors in research that the mental health of seafarers started to become a focus area for the industry.

3.3.4 Specific factors playing a role in seafarer mental health

A specific area of research that emerged around this time was the impact of piracy on seafarer mental health. The reason for this was that since about 2009, attacks off the coast of Somalia

increased dramatically, bringing piracy to the forefront of attention internationally (Treves, 2009). Ironically, piracy studies have largely overlooked the issue of psychological trauma (Garfinkle, 2011). This although piracy represents a serious menace to the industry. This is also one of the few areas in which research has been primarily qualitative. The research that has been done is mostly phenomenological in nature, with researchers using rich descriptions of victims' experiences to suggest that piracy victims are likely to suffer from mental health disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Data collected and analysed phenomenologically by Garfinkle et al. (2011) found that out of 25 seafarers held captive by pirates, most experienced symptoms of a mental health disorder. These included sleep disturbances (n=12), diminished energy (n=10), increased use of alcohol (n=7), loss of pleasure in formally pleasurable activities (n=6), increased irritability (n=5), deterioration of relationships deemed significant (n=5), and thoughts of suicide (n=3) (Garfinkle et al., 2012). A second study, also phenomenological in nature, collected data from 12 Filipino seafarers who had been captured by Somali pirates (Abila & Tang, 2014). Findings indicated that after release, the victims suffered from symptoms associated with PTSD, such as hypervigilance, disturbances in sleep, and flashbacks of the event. Since these findings were an analysis of phenomenological descriptions, a clinical diagnosis of PTSD could not be assumed, though probably strongly suggested, at least in some cases. A third phenomenological analysis of data gathered from three Filipino seafarers (all of whom had first-hand experience of being victims of piracy at sea) revealed themes that, in combination, create fertile ground for the development of PTSD, namely intense helplessness, debilitating fear, and using prayer as an automatic coping response to the threat of imminent death (Simon & Fernandez, 2016). Unfortunately, Seyel et al. (2018) found that most studies on the impact of piracy on seafarer mental health lack statistical power or have other methodological challenges. However, these phenomenological studies are very useful as they do two things. First, these studies gave a voice to victims of piracy, enabling them to describe their traumatic experiences in a way that quantitative research would have been unable to do. Second, they suggest that the symptoms experienced by these victims of piracy could be clinically significant, and thus that further investigation to confirm this is needed.

Further investigation that did confirm the findings of these studies came in the form of a quantitative comparative study, conducted approximately three years later (Seyel et al., 2018). An experimental group of 101 former piracy hostages, and a control group of 363 seafarers who had not been exposed to piracy, were assessed using clinically validated scales. Participants in both groups were from India, the Philippines and the Ukraine. The aim of the study was to assess the lasting impact of piracy on mental health. Findings indicated that 26%

of the former hostages showed symptoms consistent with PTSD (Seyel et al., 2018) and this was a greater proportion than the control group.

It is not surprising that captivity by pirates is associated with a risk of PTSD, as it is clearly a traumatic event. Perhaps more of a consideration for the industry is the pervasive threat of piracy. Seafarers who have never experienced piracy first hand are most likely aware of the constant threat of it happening to them, especially those seafarers who pass through known risky areas. The threat of experiencing trauma can be just as taxing as experiencing the trauma itself, especially if one believes one's life is at risk. This could represent an occupational stressor unique to the maritime industry, and one that needs more attention.

At this stage, the research focus in the industry narrowed, zooming in on the psychological impact of being away from home. In just over 10 years, the industry had moved from prioritising physical health with mental health as a side note, to the publication of several studies acknowledging that missing home is a serious problem for seafarers, and it has an impact on mood and emotional functioning. One of the studies that illustrates this point is a study on job and life satisfaction among 289 Croatian seafarers, all officers employed on cargo ships with at least two years' work experience, Slišković and Penezić (2016) found that levels of mental health differed significantly with regards to duration of time on board away from home, mental health being better for shorter contracts. Missing home takes its toll. The large sample size of this study (n=289) means that the results could at least point to the hypothesis that being away from home for extended periods can pose as one of the many variables causing mental health problems in seafarers. A second study by the same researchers, conducted a year later, analysed on-line survey data collected from 530 Croatian seafarers, and a direct correlation between being away from home and making poor life-style related choices was found (Slišković & Penezić, 2017). Results showed that seafarers experience higher sleep deprivation, unhealthier diet, and higher levels of smoking when at sea than at home (Slišković & Penezić, 2017). The correlation between risky behaviour with regards to physical health and poor mental health is known, and this study adds to the argument that seafarers being away from home, family and friends impacts negatively on mental health.

Around this time, Sampson, Ellis, Acejo, Turgo and Tang (2018) investigated the key changes in the living conditions of international seafarers working in the cargo, inshore, offshore, and passenger sectors of the maritime industry between the period 2011 to 2016. The quantitative study included large samples: 1 533 participants in 2011 and 1 537 participants in 2016. Encouragingly, this period saw some improvements in relation to living and working conditions. They found that the proportion of seafarers rating the associated lifestyle as good/very good

rose from 24% in 2011 to 33% in 2016. This change was found to be statistically significant (Sampson et al., 2019). However, these researchers also found that the living and working conditions for many seafarers remain less than adequate. For example, they found that one in ten seafarers must share a cabin; access to private bathrooms had not improved; and cabin storage remained inadequate for one third of participants. This led these researchers to argue that the lack of improvements in living conditions and recreational activities on board remain a concern when it comes to seafarer mental health. This study was useful in that it identified strategies that could be used to improve mental health, especially pertaining to working conditions.

3.3.5 Suicide

Suicide in seafarers is prevalent; however, some argue that the evidence proving this is "scarce and fragmented" (Melbye & Carter, 2017, p. 113). Most of the studies on suicide have been conducted in the last fifteen years and look only at the rate of suicide in seafarers. Because of this, there is not much understanding of the phenomenon in this population. With regards to suicide rate, a review of several studies up to 2009 argued that a higher suicide rate in this population is to be expected, and that the suicide rates indicated by these studies are still valid (Iverson, 2012). Other studies argue that the suicide rate has declined (Melbye & Carter, 2017). In fact, there appear to be two conflicting bodies of research on suicide in the industry – one that emphasises significant and continuing suicide mortality, and the other that is optimistic about trends and developments in the industry regarding suicide rates. It could be the case that both perspectives have merit - the rate is declining, yet the prevalence of suicide is still higher than the population average. This section will critique the research on suicide in seafarers by deconstructing these two bodies of research.

One of the reasons for confusion around the issue is that most studies have focused on Western European populations, particularly British seafarers. Taking only Western European populations into consideration, it does seem that in general there has been a declining rate of seafarer suicide from the 1960s (Melbye & Carter, 2017). Retrospective studies on mortality including suicide in this population are common. One of these addressed the issue of the general mortality rate of British seafarers whilst serving on British and foreign-flagged vessels between 1986 and 1995 (Roberts, 2000). Suicide was mentioned briefly in the study with findings indicating that British seafarers working on foreign-flagged vessels have a higher suicide rate than those working on British vessels (7% of total deaths vs 4% of total deaths). Many of the suicides among seafarers appeared to be linked to symptoms of depression or other mental illnesses (Roberts, 2000). Both groups of participants, those on British ships and those on foreign-flagged vessels, would have been exposed to similar stressors such as

extended time away from home and isolation on board. Thus, these results could lend credibility to the recommendations that have been made regarding working conditions on board, as these may have been the primary differences between the two groups.

Roberts, Jaremim, Chalasani and Rodgers (2010) conducted another retrospective analysis in 2010, investigating the rate of suicides among the seafaring population in UK merchant shipping from 1919 to 2005. Findings indicated a reduction in suicide rates since the 1960s, with factors such as changes in lifestyle cited as potential reasons for this (Roberts et al., 2010). The relationship between lifestyle factors and mental health has been touched on in this review, and based on the evidence currently available, it seems fair to suggest that improving lifestyle factors in crews should become a focus area of shipping companies. A third study conducted by Roberts and Marlow (2005) found that 87% of suicides on British ships between 1976 and 2002 happened aboard deep-sea ships. The researchers argued the reason for this is that seafarers aboard deep-sea trading ships spend more time away from home (weeks or even months) and are exposed to isolated conditions. They argued that the decline in suicide rates identified in their study could be due in part to the decline of the British deep-sea sector.

While all three of these studies produce noteworthy results, and it seems that there is a decline in suicide rates in British seafarers, the samples were not diverse. Since many of the world's seafarers come from countries such as India, Indonesia, China, Poland, Africa and the Philippines, these results cannot be generalised to the global seafarer population. A few other nationalities have been analysed with regards to suicide rate. Retrospective analysis of Polish seafarers between 1960 and 1999 found that 10% of deaths were reported to be suicides (Szymańska, Jaremin & Rosik, 2006). The researchers reported that the general suicide rate amongst men in Poland during this time was between 1.2% and 2.2% (Szymanska et al., 2006). The general percentage for suicides in women was not indicated, although Melbye and Carter (2017) noted that some studies compare suicide rates in seafarers with male working-aged populations ashore since males are proven more likely to commit suicide than women. Szymanska et al. (2006) identified risk factors such as concealed alcohol addiction, family problems and insufficient identification of symptoms of mental illness. Consequently, these researchers recommended psycho-educational interventions for Polish seafarers to increase awareness around mental health. A study on the mortality of German seafarers which involved the analysis of the 68 deaths of German seafarers on board from 1998 to 2008 revealed that 26% of deaths were owing to unnatural causes (Oldenberg, Herzog & Harth, 2016). However, since unnatural causes included both accidents and suicides, and no separation was made

between the two, assumptions about German seafarers cannot be made. The number, however, was of significant concern to the researchers.

A 2015 case study of a seafarer struggling with suicidal intent illustrates many of the complexities involving suicide and the management thereof on board (Lee et al., 2015). A 48-year-old seafarer aboard a US-flagged container ship woke his captain in the middle of the night with reports of wanting to jump off the ship, as well as reports of severe depression, anxiety and chronic insomnia. The seafarer had been cleared as fit for duty at the start of the voyage. The captain immediately implemented suicide precautions, such as confining the seafarer to a secure room free from objects that could be used to self-harm. This seafarer was also put under 24-hour watch. The captain then contacted his maritime support service via telephone (namely the Washington University Medical Faculty Maritime Medical Access) and was put into contact with an emergency medicine physician who prescribed diazepam (which was available on board) to treat the symptoms of anxiety and agitation. The seafarer clearly needed immediate repatriation; however, he was not allowed to fly until deemed fit to do so by a physician, as per procedure. The closest port refused to allow the patient to disembark on the basis that he had no visa, subsequently complicating the matter even more and delaying treatment by one day. A tele-psychiatric assessment was finally arranged, and the patient was deemed fit to fly with a repatriation team consisting of a paramedic and an assistant, both of whom were equipped with injectable haloperidol and lorazepam. The patient was then flown home safely. The psychiatrist who conducted the initial assessment reported that the crisis had been caused by the seafarer's sudden cessation of antidepressant medication, as well as multiple psychosocial stressors, including being away from home. While the captain and crew responded swiftly and appropriately, the stress this placed on them cannot be ignored. Lee et al. (2015) noted that when a seafarer experiences a mental health emergency at sea, members of the crew, who are already busy with critical operations on the vessel, are forced to maintain continuous protective watch. Placating an agitated or distressed crew member can be extremely stressful, even more when one is not trained to deal with mental health emergencies. This case study highlights the complexity of dealing with a suicidal seafarer, as well as the ripple effects and subsequent stress it could place on the rest of the crew. It also adds a personal tone to the statistics regarding suicide, lending support to the claim that qualitative data around these issues is as useful as quantitative data. This narrative certainly sheds light on the human element to the statistics on suicide at sea.

A third factor that complicates assessing suicide in the industry is disappearance at sea. This is when a seafarer is presumed to have fallen overboard and drowned. Although these are normally assumed to be accidents, some researchers argue that many of these were probably

suicides (Roberts & Marlow, 2005). Roberts' (2000) analysis of deaths aboard British and foreign-flagged vessels between 1986 and 1995 found that, apart from the number of suicides which was indicated to be between 4% and 7% of total deaths, a further 66 seafarers vanished at sea. Taking this into consideration, it is no wonder that some researchers believe that the suicide rate that has been identified is an underestimation. In an investigation into the issue of suicide at sea, Low (2006) notes that the sea can "hold a morbid attraction for depressed individuals" (p. 224) and thus suicide by jumping overboard is an ever-present risk.

Another factor which adds a layer of complexity to the issue is that global surveys on suicide, in other words with international samples, are complicated because cultural understandings of mental illness and suicide differ widely (Melbye & Carter, 2017). This can also contribute to the contradiction seen in the research on the topic. The suicide rate has been analysed from an international perspective. Sampson and Ellis (2019b) collected data on accidents and fatalities from 16 international maritime administrations for the period of 2000 to 2016. They found that suicides constituted a relatively low proportion of total fatalities – of the 1 039 fatalities over the 17 years which were covered, 3.7% were identified as suicides, with most of them recorded between the years of 2007 and 2016. The researchers noted that this is because until 2007, suicides were not generally recorded as suicides but simply as fatalities. This could substantiate the argument that the industry has taken significant steps in increasing its focus on mental health, now viewing suicides as different to fatalities caused by accidents and physical illness on board. It could also substantiate the argument that the issue of suicide in seafarers is not properly understood, especially pre-2007.

This section has made it clear that the research on suicide in the industry is "scarce and fragmented" (Melbye & Carter, 2017, p. 113). The studies that do exist lack diversity in their samples. However, there does appear to be ample support for the argument that suicide cannot be ignored by the industry, and that it poses a threat to the well-being of seafarers.

3.3.6 Gender discrimination

Latest research shows that only 2% of seafarers around the world are women (Jo, 2019). The scope of this study does not include gender discrimination in the maritime industry per se; however, a brief discussion on the impact it may have on the mental health of female seafarers, albeit only 2% of seafarers, is warranted.

Ships have their own culture, and for both men and women, joining a ship requires a degree of adjustment from the macro culture experienced on land to the micro culture of the ship. Adjustment is stressful, and it seems that women have an even more difficult time adjusting

to ship culture during the start of each voyage by having to employ various strategies to assimilate. One study that illustrates some of these strategies considered the perspectives of 28 female American women in the defence navy. The defence navy does differ in many ways from the merchant navy; however, this study is mentioned as there are so few studies of female seafarers in the merchant navy. The study took a linguistic approach to explore the identity construction and maintenance of the participants' identities (Suter, Lamb, Marko & Tye-Williams, 2006). The findings indicated that the women purposefully maintained and reproduced atypical gender identities while at service to assimilate into a masculine culture and found it difficult to adjust and revert to their pre-service identities when they returned home (Suter et al., 2006). This means that apart from the stressors that male seafarers face at sea, female seafarers may be forced to navigate stressors related to their gender, potentially making them even more at risk for issues related to mental health.

In an exploratory study into the experiences of female seafarers in the merchant navy, Kitada (2010) found that the unbalanced ratio of men and women on board causes several problems for women seafarers. It exacerbates the feeling of isolation of women from the rest of the crew, forcing them to utilise identity management or assimilation strategies, as noted by Suter et al. (2006). Participants reported using these strategies to present themselves in more feminine or masculine ways, depending on the context (at home or at sea) (Kitada, 2010). It has already been shown how isolation aboard the ship has an impact on the male seafarer, who does appear to assimilate more easily into ship culture. It seems that women seafarers have an added factor that could exacerbate social isolation and the adverse effects thereof.

Sexual harassment is another stressor that could cause mental health problems. Research conducted by Thomas (2003) in the form of semi-structured interviews with women seafarers in the merchant navy revealed that most participants take several steps to avoid unwanted attention of a sexual nature, such as locking their cabins at night, avoiding social situations, and de-feminising their appearances. Dragomir and Surugui (2013) conducted a quantitative study of 180 women seafarers between the ages of 20 and 25, who were just starting their careers at sea, and found that 48% of the participants expected to be sexually harassed on board. This was in comparison to 14% who expected fatigue to become an issue for them in the future. Ninety percent of the participants believed it is difficult to be a woman seafarer. On a positive note, Thomas (2003) reported that the women who were interviewed displayed a great deal of enthusiasm for their work at sea, as well as determination to succeed. However, the stressors faced by women on board do appear to be of a nature that could have an adverse effect on their mental health.

These studies identify two ways that gender discrimination is a potential stressor. First, women, and also perhaps men who are bothered by gender discrimination or possibly even victims of it themselves, must deal with this mistreatment in their daily lives at sea. Second, some women are forced to adopt various strategies to assimilate into the masculine culture on board, potentially experiencing even more social isolation if they do not do so. Another population that is particularly vulnerable at sea is the South African seafarer, and the next section will present evidence for this argument.

3.3.7 The South African seafarer

As far as I can ascertain, there is no published scientific data specifically on the mental health of South African seafarers. A limited amount of research has been done in relation to the general experiences of South African seafarers in the maritime industry, mostly using maritime students. Since South African seafarers work on ships with multinational crews, travelling from port to port around the world, their work environment is essentially international in nature. However, there are unique factors that inform the South African seafarer's experience of the industry, and it can be argued that these unique factors could play a role in the mental health of those in the industry.

One of the first major differences between South African seafarers and seafarers from typically seafaring countries such as the Philippines or India is the motivation for becoming a seafarer in the first place. A mixed-methods study, conducted in 2016, investigated information related to 108 South African student seafarers (70 males and 38 females) including demographic information, sources of funding for studies, awareness of their chosen career, and the likelihood of these students returning to the industry after graduation (Ghosh & Ruggunan, 2015). Findings indicated that South African seafarers differ from other seafarers in their reasons for choosing seafaring as a career. Fei and Lu (2015) noted that in traditional maritime nations, such as the Philippines or China, seafaring is often a calling, rooted in a long history and solid tradition of sailing, often within the family. Since South Africa is not typically regarded as a seafaring nation, the choice to become a seafarer is often based more on economic factors, such as bursaries available for undergraduate studies or the prospect of earning a good living while working at sea (Ghosh & Ruggunan, 2015). A cross-sectional study conducted in 2017 found that of 108 South African seafaring students who completed questionnaires, an overwhelming majority of 80 students were the first in their families to become seafarers (Ruggunan & Kanengoni, 2017). This means that seafaring as a lifestyle is not familiar to these students. This was illustrated in another South African study of seafarer experiences (Mathebekase, 2018). In semi-structured interviews of eight South African high school students planning on becoming seafarers, it emerged that the majority believe life at

sea is very similar to life ashore, where the requirement is eight working hours a day, with weekends off. Even more concerning is that this small sample of participants were reluctant to accept the reality of life at sea. They were also unaware of the fact that they cannot use the South African Labour Relations Act to fight aspects of the seafaring way of life they may deem unfair since seafaring is an international career (Mathebekase, 2018). In the same study, 43 South African seafarers who had been working at sea for at least three years noted that they were not adequately prepared for life at sea (Mathebekase, 2018). Ghosh and Ruggunan (2015) argue that this explains the trend seen in South African maritime students opting for jobs ashore once having graduated. In fact, 74% of the female participants in the study conducted by Ghosh and Ruggunan (2015) indicated that they were likely to leave their careers at sea straight after graduation. For those South African students who remain in the industry, life at sea might take a considerable period of adjustment. These researchers proposed making information about life at sea and the reality of the career accessible to seafaring students as early as possible to avoid high rates of attrition (Ghosh & Ruggunan, 2015).

Some researchers maintain that the South African maritime industry continues to face racism and racial discrimination which creates more occupational stress for black and coloured South African seafarers. Bonnin, Lane, Ruggunan and Wood (2004) argue that the legacy of apartheid persists in the form of a deeply embedded racial division of labour. Bonnin et. Al (2004) recount that during the apartheid era government policy did not allow black people to undergo training to become officers and this changed only in 1996. In 2011, Ruggunan reported that statistics confirmed by the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union indicated that South African ratings (junior positions on board) continue to be majority black, while officers majority white, noting that of the 735 employed ratings in 2011, 720 were black (Ruggunan, 2011). These findings are substantiated by qualitative data from the same study. APMOLLER/Maersk has a large South African fleet and decided in 2010 to crew ten of its ships with South African seafarers only. At first glance this appears to be very positive for the country. Qualitative data, however, shed light on the quantitative findings, highlighting again the benefits of this kind of research for the industry. A semi-structured interview with an employee from APMOLLER/Maersk revealed potential problems although it must be noted that this interview reflects the opinion and practices of only one individual (Ruggunan, 2011, p. 16):

> *"Our experience of Cape Coloured ratings (i.e. seafarers from the Western Cape of mixed racial origin) – I can't speak for the Black guys or Zulus based in Durban – is that they have a good work ethic in that*

> *they work hard, they're motivated, they have initiative, they have a natural inclination to go to sea but they also play hard and if you don't manage them properly they can be problems for you in terms of people going off the rails in port and getting drunk and stabbing each other and stuff like that. So, there's the work ethic"*

Ruggunan (2011) argues that this "reflect[s] deeply embedded stereotypes within the South African shipping industry as to the relative merits of seafarers from different ethnic backgrounds'' (p.16). Since it cannot be known for certain whether this interview reflects the opinion and practices of the entire industry, it might not reflect deeply embedded stereotypes in the industry as a whole, as Ruggunan suggests. In fact, a very recent study reported results quite different to what Ruggunan argues, although this study could illustrate intentional strides forward in the higher education industry, rather than the maritime industry. In a study of 74 seafarer students, descriptive statistics showed that significant changes have been achieved in balancing the post-apartheid landscape at Durban's Maritime Education School in terms of gender and race (Mthuli & Biyela, 2019). These researchers found that of all the students enrolled at the school, 91% of students were black, 51% of the students came from peri-urban areas, and 29% came from rural areas. The researchers concluded that the government's focus on racial equality is making headway since more students from previously disadvantaged communities are enrolling in tertiary education in the form of maritime colleges. Nevertheless, since racism persists in other sectors of societies in South Africa and internationally, it would not be surprising if this remained the case in the maritime industry.

Another problem facing South African seafarers is the unavailability of training berths for student seafarers to complete the required amount of sea time to graduate, which is normally 12 months spread over three years (Bonnin, Ruggunan & Wood, 2002). Mathebekase (2018) notes that almost no maritime training institutes in South Africa are involved in finding training berths for students. Failure to achieve the required amount of sea time means that a candidate who is qualified academically cannot qualify as an officer. A qualitative study in which interviews were conducted with ten participants in the maritime human resources management sector, and analysed using thematic analysis, revealed that the lack of training berths remains the key challenge facing South African seafarer students (Ruggunan & Kanengoni, 2015).

While research is scarce, this section has shown that there do seem to be stressors that are unique to South African seafarers. Firstly, the role of race could potentially play a negative role in the experiences of black and coloured South African seafarers. Second, it could be argued

that South African seafarers might face more challenges adjusting to life at sea versus seafarers who come from traditionally seafaring countries. Third, the lack of available training berths could cause a considerable amount of stress for seafarer students who must manage this over and above their studies. For the impact of these unique stressors to be measured and understood, further investigation into the experiences of South African seafarers, as well as preparing them for life at sea, is essential.

3.3.8 Latest findings: *pre* COVID-19

In the last four years, some of the latest research on the mental health of seafarers has seen investigation into methods that shipping companies could use to screen for mental illness, which seems to have become a priority for the industry. Jegaden et al. (2019) used two standardised scales in a cross-sectional study, one measuring proneness to boredom, and the other measuring anxiety and depression rates. A significant correlation between test scores for proneness to boredom and depression was found. The researchers cited many examples of studies supporting claims of a link between these two constructs. The recommendation by these researchers was that the Farmer and Sundberg Proneness to Boredom Scale (FSPBS), which they used in their research, could be used as part of assessing fitness for embarkation to screen seafarers for boredom and depression, although they warned that the results of the screening measure should not be used in any way other than to enhance the monitoring of the individual seafarer's mental health. It must be noted that, despite this warning, there could be ethical issues with this recommendation. It is wondered if the true intention of the use of the FSPBS would be sufficiently clear to seafarers.

Another recent study that focused on a screening measure of seafarers' mental health investigated the use of machine learning technology (Sau & Bhakta, 2019). Machine learning is the application of artificial intelligence that uses computers to access data and then learn this data. In essence, machine learning is concerned with algorithms that learn from examples. The researchers screened the rates of anxiety and depression of 470 Indian seafarers using a standardised self-report screening measure and machine learning classifiers (Sau & Bhakta, 2019). Machine learning classifiers used the algorithms to "learn" to assign classification labels to certain constructs, for example "depression" and "not depression". The researchers found that the application of machine learning technology has an accuracy level of 82% in screening for anxiety and depression in seafarers. They recommended using automated computer-based techniques as a screening procedure for seafarers to save both time and money (Sau & Bhakta, 2019). While the economic advantages to this might convince shipping companies to start using this form of screening, this recommendation has both pros and cons. On the one hand, this form of screening could be useful in that not having to be screened by a person

might make it easier for the seafarer to be open to disclosing personal information. On the other hand, reporting to a machine would fail to expose the seafarer to warmth, empathy, understanding or any of the other therapeutic skills expected from a trained mental health professional, which are aimed at assisting the individual to feel comfortable, safe and open to disclosure.

Another study measuring current rates of mental health disorders in seafarers confirmed what has been known for a while. It was a large, international study. The sample consisted of 1 572 seafarers of different nationalities, including participants from China, Indonesia, West and East Europe and Africa (Lefcowitz & Slade, 2019). The structured interviews and scores of standardised tests of psychological health indicated that 25% of the respondents qualified as having depression. This number is significantly higher than other general working populations. Of the total sample, 17% were defined as seafarers with generalised anxiety; 20% had suicidal ideation, either for several days (12.5%), more than half the days (5%) or nearly every day (2%) over the two weeks prior to taking the survey (Lefcowitz & Slade, 2019). The working environment was identified as the main factor causing mental health problems (Lefcowitz & Slade, 2019). While the industry has made huge strides with regards to protecting the rights and welfare of seafarers, these findings indicate the severity of the problem, and the urgent need for interventions and support plans to be implemented and evaluated.

Around this time, Sampson and Ellis (2019) set out to investigate the health and well-being of seafarers in the cargo ship industry, making use of a wide variety of data collection methods, namely interviewer-administered questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires. It also included an analysis of secondary data by insurance companies, known in the industry as P&I clubs (Protection and Indemnity). Apart from finding evidence of an increase in recent-onset depression and anxiety among serving seafarers, as well significantly more seafarers reporting being happy or very happy at home rather than on board, they also found that industry stakeholders, employers and charities are more prone to recommend self-help guidance and reactive services with regards to mental health rather than changes to terms and conditions on board. This is ironic considering that this study also found that employers recognise the important role that proactive changes to conditions of shipboard life play in mental health. The researchers also found that participants were able to identify several strategies that they use to combat depression including recreational activities and interactional activities. Recommendations made as an outcome of the research were substantial and focused on changes to the ship environment (such as good quality food, Internet access and gym equipment) and also intrapersonal factors (such as increasing mental resilience in seafarers). Sampson and Ellis (2019) also highlighted the role of fatigue in their

study. They found that getting tired was identified by the majority of participants as an underlying cause of shipboard depression. This finding is in line with another quantitative study which found that total physical fatigue indicators demonstrated a linear effect on depression and cognitive ability of a sample of international seafarers operating in the UK shipping sector (McNamara & Smith, 2020). The researchers noted that while the results suggest that working offshore is detrimental to physical and mental health, there is a second possibility – poor physical health and the body's inability to manage fatigue may lead to a more negative perception of work (McNamara & Smith, 2020). They went on to note that more research is needed to clarify this. Regardless of the exact relationship between the constructs, the role of mental health, and the necessity for a seafarer to be in a mentally healthy state of mind, is emphasised.

Looking at the individual factors of seafarers in the role of occupational stress was the aim of a collection of studies investigating personality traits that may mediate the impact of occupational stress. A small study of 32 participants found that high levels of extraversion enabled the participants to handle difficult situations at sea and build good relationships with their colleagues (Lipowski, Małgorzata Lipowska, Peplińska & Jeżewska, 2014). While this study was limited in its small sample size, the researchers noted that their findings regarding high extraversion matched those of a similar study of 300 Polish seafarers. In this study, Jeżewska, Moryś and Grubman-Nowak (2013) found that Polish seafarers attribute their high quality of life to social relationships and interaction, possibly emphasising the role of extraversion in the lives of these seafarers. Similarly, Silišković (2015) found that emotional stability and extraversion as personality traits contributed to good mental health in seafarers. These three studies focused on intrapersonal factors that play a role in boosting well-being, meeting a significant gap in the body of research that had thus far failed to consider important individual factors that explain good mental health in seafarers.

The role of the Internet on board, identified by Kahveci (2007) as a potential factor to improve seafarer well-being, was the subject of a 2019 study that investigated the effect of daily social media exposure on anxiety and depression disorders among seafarers. This study perhaps highlights what has been mentioned many times in this thesis – the complexity of the issue of seafarer well-being. Zamora et al. (2021) found that the prevalence of anxiety and depression was 2.68 times higher and 2.27 times higher respectively among seafarers who spend between two and four hours a day on social media as compared to seafarers who spend less than two hours online. A limitation to the study is that it consisted of only male Filipino seafarers, and thus the results cannot be generalised, but another study conducted at this time substantiated these findings. Conducted by Jensen (2021) the study involved interviews

with 43 participants on board two container ships during two two-week voyages in 2018. As already mentioned, the lack of reliable Internet on board has become something extremely unsettling for seafarers, many of whom were previously accustomed to being disconnected from their families for extended periods of time. These researchers found that stress is caused by the fact that seafarers now know that Internet access is a possibility, and thus disruption of this becomes a factor which must be managed. In addition to this, families expect to be able to communicate with the seafarer regularly, and this creates stress when they are unable to get hold of the seafarer. On the other hand, the advantage of the family having access to the Internet was discussed by Tang (2021) who spent over two years observing online interaction between seafarer families on a website called Home of Chinese Seafarers (HCS). This website has provided a platform for Chinese partners of seafarers to share their personal experiences and also receive support. Tang (2021) found that the mutual support helped the spouses and partners to deal with the inevitable stressors of being married to someone who spends extended time away from home. These results also seem to add to the paradoxical nature of seafaring, mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis: Internet access on board has been identified by seafarers themselves as instrumental to their well-being, allowing them to remain connected to loved ones ashore. Yet possibly because it allows them to remain connected to loved ones ashore, Internet access might be a contributory factor in the prevalence of feeling stressed at sea and increasing the chance of experiencing mental illness.

Possibility illustrating how far the industry has come in terms of research focused on the human element of the maritime industry, Sampson, Turgo, Cadge, Gilliat-Ray and Smith (2020) explored the role of faith and religion at sea with the aim of discovering how seafarers navigate issues of personal religion aboard a highly institutionalised work setting. The researchers found that many seafarers draw upon their faith to deal with stressors associated with working at sea. At first glance, it would have seemed that this research identified a potential practice that other seafarers could use to improve their well-being. However, the participants also shared taking care to ensure that their faith remained largely private on board. The researchers explained that there seems to be the consensus on board that religion should not interfere with work practices. They concluded from this that a greater integration of work and religious practices would probably not be regarded as positive by the industry or other seafarers. Unfortunately, it seems that a well-being practice that seems to support some seafarers is also one that must be hidden.

This section describes recent research on the issue of seafarer mental health, which is substantially more focused on the issue compared to studies at the start of the century that focused on mental health almost as an afterthought. Two screening measures (Jegaden et

al., 2019 and Sua & Bhakta, 2019) of seafarer mental health have been identified; changes to working conditions that boost mental health (Sampson & Ellis, 2019) have been recommended; the positive role that extraversion plays in seafarer mental health (Silišković, 2015) has been discussed. In addition to this, the importance of faith and religion in the lives of seafarers (Sampson et al., 2020) and the crucial role that social media support groups can play in the lives of seafarer families have also been the subject of recent research in this time frame. The last few years have been crucial to adding to the body of research on seafarer mental health.

The next section will narrow its focus onto the impact of maritime culture on board. Limited research has been conducted on the impact of this on mental health; however, what has been found is certainly worth considering because of the effect it could have on a seafarer's sense of identity.

3.3.9 Culture

The complex role that culture plays on board and its interaction with mental health has been the subject of a limited number of studies. Merchant marine culture and its components were outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, and as noted in this chapter, merchant marine culture consists of safety culture, organisation culture, and ship culture (Carol-Dekker, 2019). Kim and Jang (2018) investigated the role that organisational culture plays in the lives of seafarers. In a sample of 320 seafarers, who had lived and worked onboard for more than six months, it was found that organisational culture that is supportive can boost the self-efficacy of seafarers, improve their work quality, and strengthen group coherence. This led the researchers to recommend that maritime industry executives improve organisational support and invest more in the welfare of its employees. While Kim and Jang (2018) note that this study was limited in its non-probability convenience sampling scheme among employees of a South Korean shipping company, they went on to argue that organisational culture is one of the most important influences on the quality of work for Korean seafarers. This study was helpful in identifying the significance of organisational support; however, considering that organisational culture is only one component of merchant marine culture, it could be argued that this study was simplistic in its argument and lends credibility to Carol-Dekker's (2018) argument that maritime scholarship does not appear to realise that culture in the merchant navy is, in reality, a complex set of systems.

Another example of the complexity of culture on board is illustrated by a recent study by Pike et al. (2021) who engaged in surveys, panel discussions and interviews with female seafarers to identify how their experiences on board could be improved. They found that ship culture

poses both a threat and a potential source of support for women on board. The strict hierarchical structure on board provides a system of control where the captain's authority is not questioned. Pike et al. (2021) explain that this, along with a tradition of a patriarchal structure, creates an environment ripe for stereotyping and discrimination. However, they note that this also means that the captain, with the level of influence he has on board, has great power in establishing an onboard culture of tolerance and acceptable behaviour. The participants in the study describe being aware of this fact, as well as the failure of the industry to exploit this power to create a more equitable working environment for women. In this sense, organisational culture is both a resource and a hindrance to women on board.

In a comprehensive investigation into the topic, Carol-Dekker (2018) reviewed maritime theses, conducted face-to-face interviews, consulted maritime newspaper and journal articles, and observed interactions on social media to analyse and discuss the multifaceted role that culture plays on board. Findings indicate that the multicultural environment on board can have a profound impact on a seafarer's identity, as even though a person is able to merge into an environment that is multicultural, one's innate culture is so intrinsically embedded that it can be considered omnipresent (Carol-Dekker, 2018). Therefore, the seafarer must amalgamate into the multicultural environment on board, but this is a conscious and intentional process of deciding to interact with the rest of the crew on board. Carol-Dekker (2017) notes that failure to do this exacerbates stress in seafarers.

It is argued that for any discussion on seafarer mental health, culture must be taken into consideration. On its own, it is an extremely complex issue, with safety culture, organisational culture, ship culture and cultural diversity with regards to different nationalities on board all playing a role.

3.3.10 Latest findings: COVID-19 and beyond

The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another factor that has put huge strain on the maritime industry, raising alarm regarding seafarer mental health. The maritime industry has found itself scrambling to deal with the myriad of consequences of the pandemic, including highlighting the urgent need to train shipping personnel in epidemiology and the psychosocial impact of the pandemic. Reports have been made about the plight of seafarers who have spent up to fourteen months aboard but have been unable to return home to their families even though their contracts have ended. In 2020, it was estimated that up to 100 000 seafarers remained at sea, unable to return to shore while borders remained closed or were restricted (Kahelli, 2020). It is no wonder then that the United Nations has called for seafarers to be recognised as key workers internationally (Zarocostas, 2020).

It is arguable that a cargo ship is one of the worst environments in which to find oneself amid a pandemic. These ships almost never have doctors aboard; the crew lives in cramped conditions, making social distancing impossible; and if a seafarer does become ill, he must wait until arrival at a port that will allow him to disembark, either to be hospitalised or repatriated (Kahelli, 2020). For the more than 1.6 million seafarers who *have* been able to get home to their families, seafarers face suspicion based on the fear that they are carriers of the virus (Kahelli, 2020). While at home, they must also deal with the fact that the future of the shipping industry is uncertain. Slišković (2020) conducted interviews with 752 seafarers and found that participants experience threats to their economic well-being (as many are not able to get back to work) while at home. The pandemic has caused a global economic crisis which has dire consequences for the industry (Arifin, 2020). Predictions about how global trade might recover have been widely speculative, resulting in a very uncertain future for seafarers and the families that depend on them (Kahelli, 2020).

Latest research on the topic continues to pour in, and most of it is focused on the poor mental health seafarers are experiencing. A cross-sectional study was conducted in July 2020 among a sample of 470 seafarers of diverse nationalities working aboard oil tankers (Baygi et al., 2021). Three questionnaires were used to assess mental health, namely the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, the General Health Questionnaire, and the Zung Self-rating Anxiety Scale. The prevalence of depression among the sample was found to be 12.3% and the prevalence of stress, 11.6%. Furthermore, the researchers found that the odds of depression increased by 20% per month that the participant remained on board (Baygi et al., 2021). Another study, conducted around the same time, gathered similar results. The sample consisted of 671 seafarers, and an overwhelming 40% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced symptoms of low mood almost every day for the past seven days (Pauksztat, Grech, Kitada & Jensen, 2020). Over half of the sample reported symptoms of anxiety. Other researchers investigated the well-being of seafarers during on-board COVID-19 outbreaks using the General Health Questionnaire-12 (Pesel, Canals, Sandrin & Jensen, 2020). Over 60% of the participants did not think that every precaution had been taken to ensure their health at work, with 30% suffering from significant insomnia and 26% reporting feeling unhappy or depressed during their latest voyage. Many other quantitative studies have found an increased level of distress and depression in seafarers during the pandemic (see for example Qin et al., 2021; Baygi et al., 2021; Battineni et al., 2021 and Kaptan & Olgun Kaptan, 2021).

While these studies suggest that the maritime industry has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, it could be argued that the industry has also in a sense benefited from the pandemic. The pandemic has served to highlight the plight of seafarers and bring more focus to their mental health both by the industry and the general population. This attention has come in the form of studies that have simply confirmed what those in the industry have known for years – that the mental health of seafarers is a concern. Sadly, studies that investigate exactly what will help these individuals remains scarce. The next section will go on to describe what few interventions aimed at supporting seafarers have been implemented in recent years.

3.4 Mental health interventions in the industry

As mentioned in this chapter, the industry has repeatedly throughout the last two decades recommended psycho-education initiatives for seafarers to mitigate the damaging effects of poor mental health. Despite this, psycho-education interventions are extremely limited, with research measuring their efficacy being even more limited. In fact, Carter and Karlshoej (2017) argued that most psycho-education interventions have rarely included arrangements for evaluating how effective they are. A systematic review conducted very recently substantiated this argument. In this review, Baygi et al. (2020) investigated various journal platforms using keywords including lifestyle interventions in the maritime industry. The findings were concerning, considering the immense level of stress on seafarers. Only 10 articles met the criteria for eligibility in the review. Studies were limited in terms of nationality – six studies were conducted in the US, three in Denmark, and one in Finland. The topics of various psycho-education programmes included stress management, anti-smoking and anti-drinking, healthy eating, and sexual behaviour programmes. Only two were found on the topic of stress management. Four studies discussed interventions that included micro-nutrient supplementation, physical activity, and pharmacotherapy. The researchers also noted that the quality of all the studies they reviewed was modest. Weaknesses in research that reduced the scientific quality of these studies included small sample sizes, improper use of control groups, insufficient interventions or implementation failure, and high dropout rates (Baygi et al., 2021). The researchers highlighted the urgent need for studies with more rigorous research design.

One suggestion regarding psycho-education interventions is promising, although it has been the focus of only a few recent studies. McVeigh et al. (2016) recommended using positive psychology to address seafarer mental health. Positive psychology, spearheaded by psychologist Martin Seligman, focuses on the study of well-being, and elements that support well-being. McVeigh et al. (2016) argued that positive psychology might help seafarers flourish in a context that “recognises and enacts the benefits of a positive and reasonable work

environment" (p. 20). This is illustrated by a study already discussed in this chapter – Carotenuto et al. (2013) were able to identify key factors that could be implemented by shipping companies to improve crew well-being by interviewing seafarers with relatively high scores on an index that measures psychological well-being. McVeigh et al. (2016) note that interventions from a strength-based approach, while addressing health challenges and factors, might be the ideal option for an industry in which people appear to feel uncomfortable being open with others or appearing vulnerable. These researchers also cite several examples of interventions using positive psychology, such as mindfulness, developing psychological capital, and resilience-building. McVeigh et al. (2016) went on to recommend robust research to establish the efficacy of such interventions that focus more on well-being than on stress in the seafarer population.

3.5 Summary of main findings

This literature review began by acknowledging the complexities surrounding research into seafarer mental health. One of these factors is differing views on depression. The seafaring community is a multi-cultural one, with different cultures conceptualizing depression in different ways. This multi-culturalism also creates such a diverse mix of individuals that extrapolating date from one study to another in the field of maritime research is not always possible. Other factors that add complexity to researching seafarer mental health include the fact that the exact suicide rate in seafarers is uncertain, with some researchers estimating that the rate is higher than recorded figures. This is problematic as the suicide rate of a population is normally considered a fair indication of how that population is doing with regards to mental health. Furthermore, fitness for duty, an essential pre-requisite for the job, presents as a threat to disclosure of difficulties with mental health.

In terms of research, the turn of the century saw some increase in research on seafarer mental health, but this remained a small percentage of research output. Several findings were made confirming the stress on seafarers from a physiological perspective. Fatigue was a popular focus of research around this time, with researchers highlighting the development, implementation, and evaluation of strategies to address fatigue. Noise was also highlighted as a potential factor in seafarer stress levels, especially the impact that noise has on sleep on board. Research also included other populations closely related to seafarers, such as their spouses and seafaring students. Many of these studies were qualitative in nature, illustrating two things: first, that seafarer spouses and seafarer students are also prone to stress for various reasons; and second, that there is a place for both quantitative and qualitative studies

to enhance our understanding of the psychological impact of seafaring on seafarers and related populations.

A new decade, at the start of 2010, saw several reviews on seafarer mental health published, with researchers calling for more qualitative research to be conducted. Growing awareness into seafarer well-being was identified by researchers with some noting the reason for this is that seafarer mental health and well-being has been reframed in terms of consequences for mistakes in performance and the resulting economic loss. The focus also narrowed at this time on the impact of piracy on mental health, primarily owing to the dramatic increase in attacks off the coast of Somalia in about 2009. Qualitative studies were especially useful in understanding the experiences of piracy victims. The psychological impact of being away from home and the psychological impact of living on board with poor conditions were two focus areas for researchers at this time. It was found that both cause considerable stress for seafarers. Suicide amongst seafarers was also discussed, and it became clear that the research on suicide amongst seafarers lacks clarity. It was noted, however, that suicide cannot be ignored by the industry, and that it poses a considerable threat to well-being for seafarers.

Two more specific areas discussed in the review included gender discrimination and the South African seafarer. The numerous studies included in this review note that both populations (female seafarers and South African seafarers) face unique challenges. South African seafaring students were found to be particularly vulnerable as they seem to face more challenges adjusting to life at sea versus seafarers who come from traditionally seafaring countries. Research also suggested that these students may be vulnerable to problems related to a lack of training berths and potential racism in the industry.

More recent research, conducted over the past four years, saw investigation into methods that shipping companies could use to screen for mental illness, with machine learning being identified as an option. The role of personality traits was also investigated, with researchers exploring how intrapersonal factors, such as extraversion and emotional stability, boost seafarer well-being. Finally, the complex role that culture plays on board was explored, with researchers recommending that maritime industry executives improve support as it relates to the many kinds of culture found on board. Researchers also found that failure to amalgamate into the multicultural environment on board can exacerbate stress in seafarers.
COVID-19 was found to be a turning point of sorts for the industry and resulted in stakeholders scrambling to deal with the myriad of catastrophic consequences for seafarers, some of whom became trapped on board for up to 14 months at a time. The mental health of seafarers was thrust into the spotlight resulting in the United Nations calling for seafarers to be recognized

as keyworkers internationally. In fact, stakeholders have argued that the pandemic has served to highlight the plight of seafarers and bring more focus to their mental health both by the industry and the general population. Latest research has found that seafarers are struggling significantly. Rates of depression and anxiety in this population have proven to be very high post-pandemic.

The review concluded with a brief discussion on mental health interventions in the industry. The industry has repeatedly recommended psycho-education initiatives for seafarers to mitigate the damaging effects of poor mental health. One recommendation focused on the use of positive psychology as a lens through which to address seafarer mental health.

3.6 Conclusion to chapter

In conclusion to this chapter, it is noted that the literature on seafarer mental health shows the positive strides the industry has taken in the last twenty years towards prioritising seafarer well-being; gaps in research, however, remain. There appear to be three primary gaps in the literature. First, qualitative research in the form of descriptions of seafarer's personal experiences is needed to enrich the understanding of the multitude of factors that impact seafarer mental health. Second, the impact of mental health initiatives is yet to be thoroughly understood, and this is important especially when one considers the stigma regarding mental health in the maritime industry. Robust research in these three areas is needed. Third, positive psychology needs to feature more in the understanding of maritime mental health. In other words, there is a need to look at what positive qualities are evident in a mentally healthy seafarer that boost well-being, rather than considering a mentally healthy seafarer as one who does not present with mental illness. This is especially significant because most of the research about seafarer mental health in the last two years has been about the negative impact of the pandemic. The next chapter will go on to describe the field of positive psychology and discuss models of occupational well-being that have been used in previous research.

CHAPTER FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW PART II
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Finally, I always go to sea as a sailor, for the healthy exercise and the fresh air on the foredeck.

Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 732)*

4.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter, which forms the second part of the literature review, will describe the field of positive psychology and the concept of well-being, which is in response to the calls to take a positive psychology lens to a field that has traditionally focused on the negative. This chapter will then go on to look at occupational well-being and how the term has been understood in recent times. Finally, this chapter will focus on Seligman's (2002) conceptualisation of psychological well-being (PWB) in the occupational space, and then go on to justify the use of psychological well-being as a lens through which to view well-being in seafarers.

4.2 The role of positive psychology in this IPA study

As noted in the literature review, Carotenuto et al. (2013) were some of the first researchers to emphasise seafarer well-being as a primary construct in the study of mental health in this population, defining well-being in seafarers as "the satisfaction from working life and interest in everyday activities" (p. 218). A few years later, McVeigh et al. (2016) went on to recommend using positive psychology as a lens through which to view seafarer mental health. This recommendation has become especially pertinent since most of the research about seafarer mental health in the last two years has been about the negative impact of the pandemic, with a clear gap in research on positive qualities in a mentally healthy seafarer that aid well-being. After conducting the first part of the literature review, and identifying this gap, I wanted to include positive psychology in my research. At the same time, since IPA is inductive and conclusions are based on what is found in the data and not on testing models and theoretical perspectives that already exist, I had to be careful about the role that positive psychology would play in my IPA research. While I was initially unsure about how to include a theoretical perspective like positive psychology within an IPA study, I started, nevertheless, to read through the literature on the field, following the guidelines of Smith and Nizza (2021) who note that a researcher who has not conducted prior research may find it tricky to understand the context of the participant and miss out on asking pertinent questions. I found, as Smith and Nizza (2021) anticipated would happen, that existing research (in this case on positive psychology and well-being) offered ''an entrée to a topic that could be further illuminated by an intensive examination of an individual's personal experience of it'' (p.12).

On a practical level, positive psychology influenced my study in three ways: First, positive psychology helped me to refine my research question. In fact, Smith and Nizza (2021) recommend that the IPA researcher look closely at existing qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as their strengths and limitations as it helps to do just that – refine the research question. My review of research in the field of positive psychology helped me to move from focusing on the lived experiences of seafarers who are mentally healthy to focusing on the lived experiences of seafarers with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being.

Second, having a comprehensive understanding of the various definitions of well-being (Seligman's in particular) informed my identification of an information-rich sample whose experiences of living with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being might shed light on issues that have not yet emerged in current literature on occupational well-being in the industry. This is well within the constraints of an IPA study since IPA researchers aim to ''gather rich, detailed accounts from people about those experiences, and then describe, interpret and convey what the experience was like'' (Smith & Nizza, 2021, p 12).

Third, positive psychology and a study of some of the various conceptualisations of well-being informed my interpretation of the data. As noted by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) the final IPA paper includes both the participants' accounts and an interpretive commentary by the researcher. My interpretive commentary was richer because my review of the extant literature gave me a greater understanding of the field of positive psychology, as well as a better understanding of the nuances of the term *well-being*. I used the phenomenological technique of bracketing (which will be explained in the next chapter) to ensure that this understanding did not influence my data collection or initial analysis of the participant's experiences. In other words, remaining true to the IPA approach, I ensured that any findings about well-being in seafarers were derived from the data, and not the other way around (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

4.3 Introduction to positive psychology

Psychologists have traditionally regarded good mental health as the absence of mental illness (Gable & Haidt, 2005). For example, depression is often viewed as an excess of negative emotions and negative cognitions, with the improvement thereof being the goal of interventions. Because of this, some believed that the field of psychology was imbalanced and that key processes that contributed to the flourishing of people and groups were being neglected and ignored (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Similarly, Seligman, who has played a key role

in the development of the positive psychology field, argued that psychologists have “scant knowledge of what makes life worth living” (in Csikszentmihalyi, & Seligman, 2000, p. 2). He went on to say that working almost exclusively on damaged brains and personal weaknesses has made psychologists poorly equipped to prevent mental illness (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). It was this perspective that apparently resulted in the impetus Seligman needed to establish the field (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000).

4.4 The origin of positive psychology

In the 1950s, the global field of psychology was strongly focused on diagnosis and treatment of disorders as a response to returning veterans at the end of World War II (Gable & Haidt, 2005). The medical model of disease, popular in other fields at the time, meant that psychology was focused on investing in identifying causes of mental illness and creating therapies for those suffering (Gable & Haidt, 2005). It was also during this time, towards the end of World War II, that Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian psychologist and researcher, started observing people that he had considered to be confident and successful become helpless and hopeless when they lost their jobs, money or status. At the same time, Csikszentmihalyi noted another group of people behaving very differently in the same situation. He described this second group of people as follows (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000, p. 7):

> *“Their serenity was a beacon that kept others from losing hope. And these were not the men and women one would have expected to emerge unscathed: They were not necessarily the most respected, better educated, or more skilled individuals. This experience set me thinking: What sources of strength were these people drawing on?”*

According to Seligman, approximately 50 years he experienced an epiphany while he was with one of his children. He described working in the garden one day and grumbling at his young daughter for interfering, of course immediately regretting it as she walked away. A short while later she came back to him and the following exchange reportedly occurred (in Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000, p. 5):

> *“Daddy, I want to talk to you.”*
> *“Yes, Nikki?”*
> *“Daddy, do you remember before my fifth birthday? From the time I was three to the time I was five, I was a whiner. I whined every day. When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the*

hardest thing I've ever done. And if I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch."

Seligman explained that this conversation awakened him to the idea that raising his daughter was about amplifying and nurturing this strength – what Seligman referred to as his daughter's ability to "see into the soul" (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000, p. 6) – to form a buffer against the difficulties life would inevitably throw at her. Seligman went on to describe a serendipitous meeting between himself and Csikszentmihalyi, who shared similar perspectives, that resulted in Seligman's realisation that his role as president of the American Psychology Association, which began in 1998, must be used to shift psychology's focus towards identifying strengths and what helps people to lead fulfilling lives (Gable & Haidt, 2005). It was also around this time, the end of the 20th century, when other psychologists started advocating for greater emphasis on positive functioning and positive psychological resources such as acceptance and purpose (see Ryan & Deci, 2001 and Ryff, 1989). Thus, the field of positive psychology was born.

4.5 The definition of positive psychology

In defining this broad term, it is useful to start with what positive psychology is *not*. Firstly, positive psychology does not imply that the rest of psychology is negative. Gable and Haidt (2005) argued that the rest of psychology should be seen as neutral as a large amount of research in the field focuses neither on distress nor well-being. They explained that there are many topics under study that have two sides, and that the positive is often discussed but not emphasised, noting, for example, that there is a great deal of research regarding familial conflict, but few studies investigating families laughing together or having fun (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Secondly, positive psychology is not the denial of the distressing aspects of life. Researchers studying positive psychology acknowledge dysfunction and human suffering (Gable & Haidt, 2005). However, the goal of positive psychology is to study what Gable and Haidt (2005) referred to as "the other side of the coin – the ways that people feel joy, show altruism, and create healthy families and institutions" (p. 105).

If this is what positive psychology is *not*, then what *is* positive psychology? Advocates of the field explain that positive psychology is the study of things that contribute to optimal functioning of individuals, groups and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Seligman expanded on this by addressing the past, present and future in his definition of the term: firstly, the past is about contentment and satisfaction with what has been; the present is about positive individual traits, such as forgiveness, perseverance and courage; the future is about moving individuals,

groups and institutions towards better citizenship, tolerance, altruism and civility (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000, p. 2). Sheldon and King (2001) adopted a more practical definition, describing positive psychology as the practice of "finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving" (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216) and this is what Alex-Linley, Joseph, Harrington and Wood (2006) built upon when they argued that positive psychology is about identifying processes and mechanisms that lead to outcomes that can be viewed as desirable. All these definitions converge on the idea that the positive aspects of human experience and functioning are significant. As a scientific discipline, positive psychology focuses on strengths, positive traits and skills that help individuals and communities to flourish.

4.6 The aim of positive psychology

4.6.1 Introduction

As already noted, Seligman argued that the tendency in the past has been to see good mental health as the absence of negative syndromes such as depression, anxiety, and stress. He believed that this tendency is rooted in the fact that there exists a missing puzzle piece in traditional psychology, namely well-being which he considered the outcome or goal of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). The World Health Organisation (WHO) mentioned the term in its definition of mental health in 1947, connecting the concept of mental health to the concept of well-being for the first time:

> *"Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"* (WHO, 2004, p. 12).

There has been increasing interest in the study of well-being in recent decades (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; and Seligman, 2011). Synonyms and descriptions associated with the term include positive affect (Bradburn, 1969), happiness (Pollard & Lee, 2003), one's ability to fulfil goals (Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project, 2008); and life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1997; Seligman, 2002).

4.6.2 Definitions of well-being

Definitions of well-being are generally rooted in two approaches, with a third conceptualisation of well-being arising from a combination of the two approaches in the early 2000s. The hedonic tradition (often referred to as subjective well-being or SWB) emphasises happiness, pleasure, and positive affect (see Bradburn, 1969) and the eudaimonic tradition emphasises positive

psychological functioning and human development (see Rogers, 1961). The concept of psychological well-being emerged from combining the two approaches.

Bradburn (1969) was one of the first researchers to attempt to define well-being. He emphasised affect in his understanding of the term, and argued that:

> *"An individual will be high in psychological well-being in the degree to which he has an excess of positive over negative affect and will be low in well-being in the degree to which negative affect predominates over positive" (Bradburn, 1969, p. 9).*

Diener (1984) was also influential at the time with his work involving subjective well-being (SWB). In conceptualising this term, Diener added a cognitive component to Bradburn's focus on the emotional and argued that subjective well-being also includes the degree to which an individual evaluates their life as satisfactory or close to the ideal (Diener, 1984). Kahneman (1999) concurred with both researchers, advocating for a component to well-being that is concerned with how happy an individual is and a cognitive component relating to life satisfaction. Life satisfaction and life events were the focus of Heady and Wearing (1989) who expanded on well-being conceptualisations rooted in the hedonic tradition with their formulation of the dynamic-equilibrium theory. According to this theory, each person has two kinds of equilibrium – a subjective well-being equilibrium and life-events equilibrium. These researchers advocated that SWB and both positive and negative life events shift over time, but they do so around a baseline that remains stable – the equilibrium (Headey & Wearing, 1989).

The hedonic approach was criticised by Ryff (1989) who believed that Bradburn and other researchers advocating this conceptualisation of well-being focused too much on positive and negative affect, and that these definitions were, as a result, too narrow. Ryff (1989) argued that there are other aspects to well-being, and proposed six dimensions of positive mental health, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Advocating an approach rooted in the eudaimonic understanding of well-being, Ryff argued that well-being is a dynamic concept that covers the subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as behaviour related to well-being (Ryff, 1989). Compton (2001) also argued for different components of well-being rooted in the eudaimonic tradition, identifying them as subjective well-being, personal growth, and religiosity. Since he used terminology similar to Diener and Ryff, but with different connotations, this added to the confusion regarding the exact definition of the term.

4.6.3 Psychological well-being

Advocating for a combination of both the hedonic and eudaimonic traditions were Ryff (2014) and Seligman (2011) who started referring to psychological well-being. Seligman published *Flourishing* in 2011. In this book, he outlined the building blocks of psychological well-being. He rejected the hedonic notion that well-being is about life satisfaction and happiness, finding these terms problematic because they are determined more by an individual's mood than anything else (Seligman, 2010). At the same time, Seligman argued that the eudaimonic approach to well-being is also insufficient, as happiness and life satisfaction remain important components to the construct. His combination of the two traditions resulted in his formulation of the concept of psychological well-being or PWB, with the following definition of the concept: psychological well-being is optimal functioning and the experience of positive emotion and happiness with the presence of meaning and the development of one's potential (Seligman, 2002).

4.7 Occupational well-being

4.7.1 Introduction

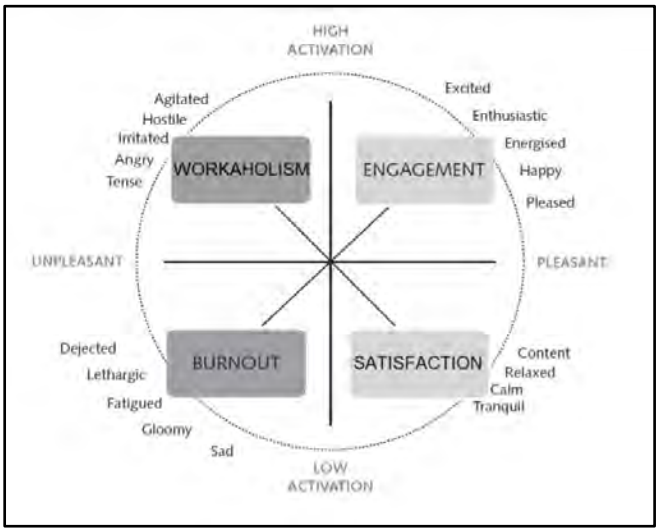
Occupational well-being has been conceptualised using both the eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives of well-being, as well as Seligman's perspective of psychological well-being. Most studies on occupational well-being are from the hedonic perspective, conceptualising occupational well-being as judgement of work life as enjoyable (Peiro, Kozusznik, Rodríguez-Molina & Tordera, 2019). Morale, job satisfaction and distress at work are also Included in studies using this approach to well-being (Cotton & Hart, 2003). As noted, the concept has also been studied using psychological well-being as a basic definition, in doing so emphasising both positive emotion and satisfaction at work as well as meaning and development of potential. The various understandings of occupational well-being have led to the formulation of several different conceptualisations that provide differing views of well-being. Because my research is focused on seafarers with reportedly high levels of well-being, this section will describe just a few of the many contemporary conceptualisations of the term to illustrate firstly how nuanced the term is and secondly how many different definitions of the term exist.

4.7.2 Contemporary conceptualisations of occupational well-being

The hedonic understanding of well-being has dominated literature on occupational well-being, especially in the last two decades. In their model of Subjective Well-being at Work, Bakker and Oerlemans (2011) mapped various elements that impact, both positively and negatively, subjective well-being. In their review of research on the matter, these researchers found that job performance is most optimal when there is a high combination of both high pleasure and

high activation (i.e., the upper right-hand quadrant in their model – see *Fig. 1*). According to this understanding of occupational well-being, an employee with optimal performance would have high levels of activation manifesting for example as being enthusiastic about their role, along with high levels of pleasure manifesting for example as feeling pleased about their work.

Figure 1
Model of Subjective Well-being at Work
Taken from Bakker and Oerlemans (2011, p, 189)

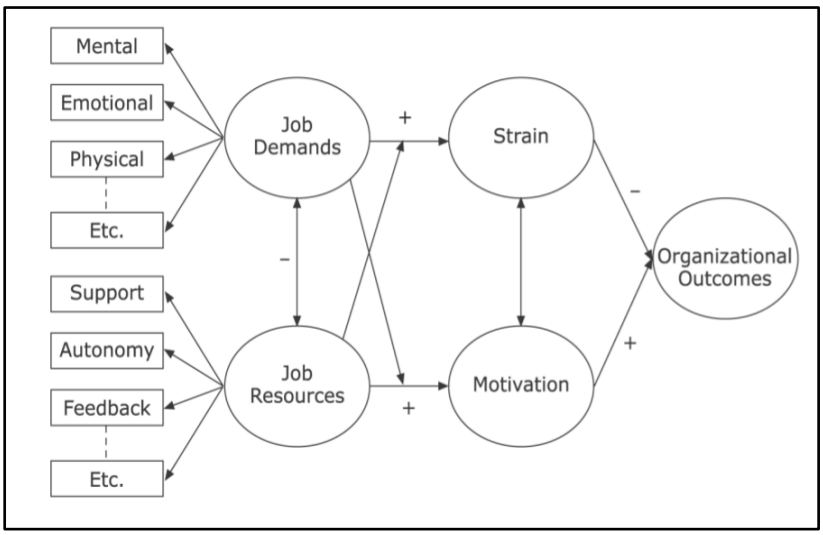


Around this time, the industry started looking at another conceptualisation of well-being rooted in the hedonic tradition, namely the trait approach to employee well-being, which featured strongly in studies on the matter at the time (Xanthopoulou, Bakker & Ilies, 2012). The trait approach emphasises differences between individuals in the role of well-being at work (Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002). However, the approach was quickly discredited, with inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between traits and work-related well-being resulting in researchers questioning the validity of this approach (Xanthopoulou et al., 2012).

The Job-Demands-Resource Model or JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) was another model used to explain well-being at work (*Fig. 2*). This model conceptualises well-being as a balance between job demands and job resources. If demands and resources are out of balance, well-being is negatively impacted. On the contrary, resources at work have the power to generate well-being and improve job performance. If resources outweigh demands, then well-being is the outcome (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) also argued that resources at work have motivational potential, and lead to employees who are less cynical, perform better, and have better work engagement. These researchers believed

that their model was unique in that most models at the time focused on negative outcomes of workplace stress rather than ways to improve well-being, such as burnout, strain, and ill health (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Figure 2
Job-Demands-Resource Model
Taken from Bakker and Demerouti (2007, p. 313)



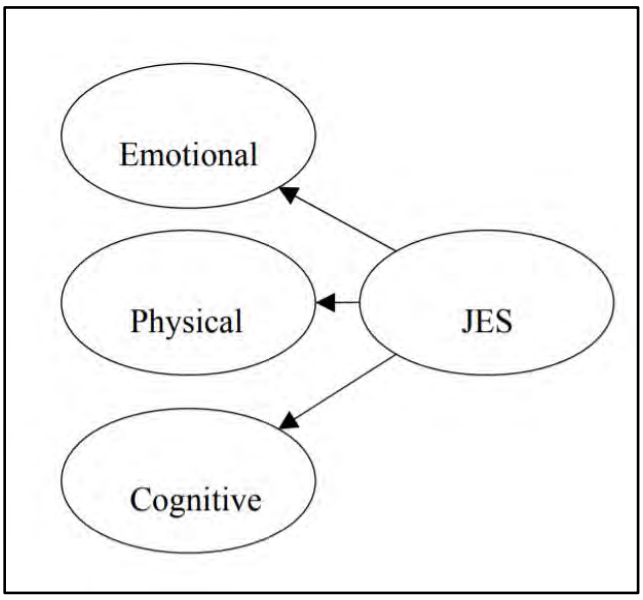
Perhaps one of the reasons that the hedonic tradition has been so dominant in literature on occupational well-being is the happy productive worker theory, which has been the subject of decades of research in the field of occupational health. In fact, Wright and Cropanzano (2007) note that it is the ‘‘holy grail of management research’’ (p. 269). This theory links positive affect or happiness to productivity. Despite its influence, support for this assumption remains equivocal (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001) and thus support for other approaches to well-being at work (namely eudaimonic well-being and PWB) appears to be growing (Fisher, 2014). In fact, when considering the elements of various eudaimonic-based models to workplace well-being, the usefulness of this perspective of well-being is highlighted. Elements such as thriving at work, motivation, meaning, calling, flow and employee engagement have been included as constructs, and sometimes even synonyms, of the term.

One of these terms that is often used as a synonym for occupational well-being is employee engagement. A great deal of research has been done on how the term can be used as a synonym for occupational well-being (Robertson & Cooper, 2010). For example, in a meta-analysis, Harter, Schmidt, Killham and Agrawal (2009) found that engaged employees have lower rates of turnover, internal theft, work quality defects, absenteeism and safety incidents.

Two theoretically sound models for assessing the concept of employee engagement are the Job Engagement Scale or JES (Rich, LePine & Crawford, 2010) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale or UWES (Schaufeli et al., 2003). Emphasising the lack of consensus around defining issues related to occupational well-being, both models include aspects of positive affect, which are founded in the hedonic approach to well-being.

The JES (*Fig. 3*) stems from Kahn's (1990) definition of work engagement, which is a momentary state in which people invest themselves in their work. Rich et al. (2010) argued that work engagement has a physical, cognitive, and emotional component. The physical component includes whether an employee works with energy and intensity, whether they exert a lot of energy at work, and whether they work as hard as possible to perform well. The cognitive component includes whether the employee is absorbed in work, how hard they concentrate, and how much attention they pay at work. Finally, the emotional component includes positive affect, and refers to how energetic, enthusiastic, proud and positive the employee feels about their work. The JES has been proven to be a scientifically valid method of measuring engagement at work (Jayanthi, Kowsalya, Manju, 2020).

Figure 3
Job Engagement Scale
(My own copy of the model as described in Rich et al., 2010)

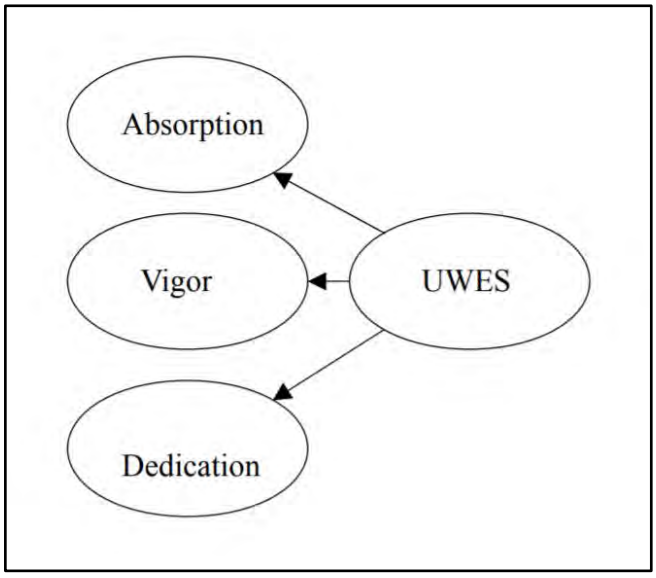


Schaufeli et al. (2003) proposed the UWES (*Fig. 4*) which includes employee vigour, dedication and absorption as part of their conceptualisation of work engagement.

Figure 4

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

(My own copy of the model as described in Schaufeli et al., 2003)

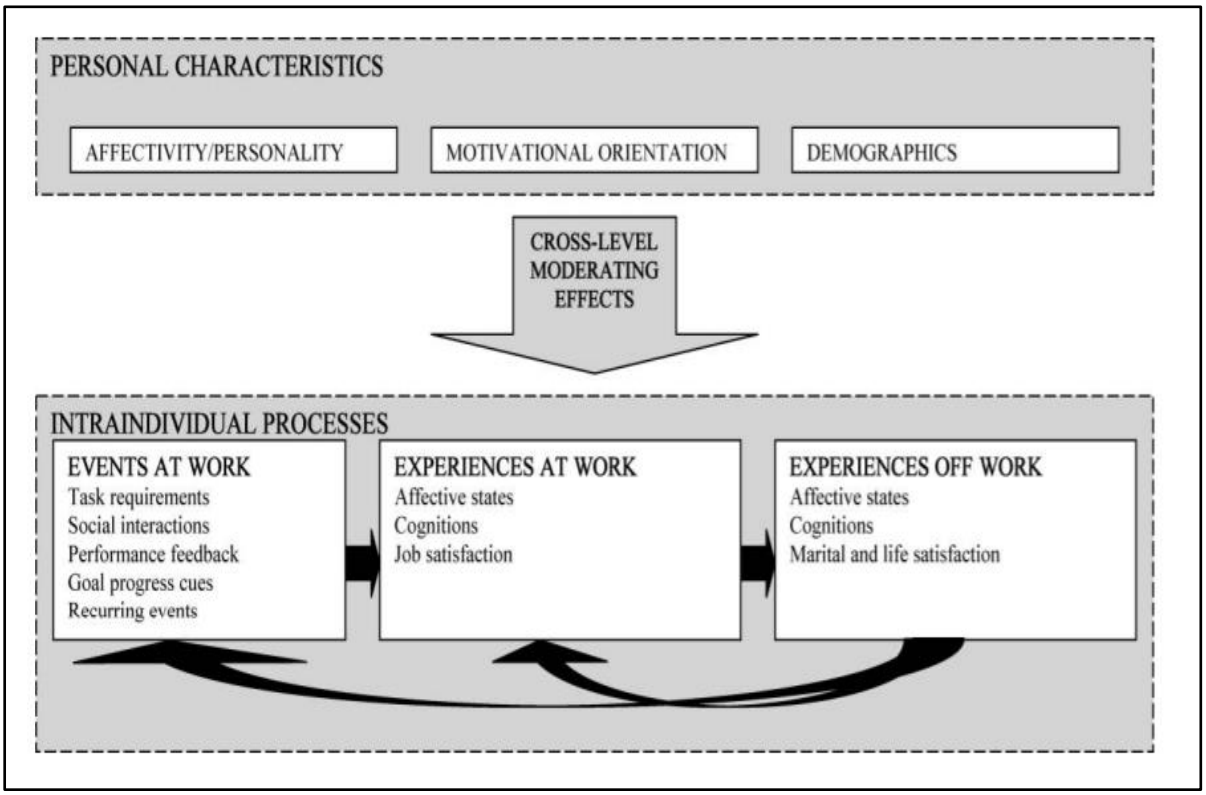


The JES and UWES, like earlier models of occupational well-being, fail to include social interaction and relationships. Fisher (2014) suggests that this is because the era of behaviourism in psychology and the cognitive revolution that followed meant that little attention was paid to the social aspects of work life involving interaction with others and the organisation. The reason one's relationships (both with the environment and with others) are so important to consider when conceptualising occupational well-being is that changes within an individual can occur because of external cues found in the work environment. Daily diary studies have found that the total variance pertaining to work engagement that is owing to within-person fluctuations ranges from 28% to 72% (Xanthopoulou et al., 2012). This means that employees may feel engaged from day to day because of what occurs around them. It is argued that relationships with other colleagues and superiors would certainly influence what occurs around the employee at work.

Psychological well-being includes aspects of both the hedonic and eudaimonic understandings of well-being, and many of these models do include social interaction and relationships as a facet. Occupational health models that emphasise psychological well-being are useful in that they intentionally include both hedonic and eudaimonic facets of well-being. An example of one of these is the model formulated by Illies, Shwind and Heller (2007). This model of workplace well-being (*Fig. 5*) includes elements relevant to hedonic well-being (such as affect and job satisfaction) and eudaimonic well-being (such as perception of goal

progress). The researchers portrayed personal predictors (such as personality) and situational predictors (such as demographics) as unfolding across three constructs: experiences at work, events at work and experiences of work. The model assumes that these personal and situational predictors have a moderating impact on these three constructs. Illies et al. (2007) suggested that research based on the model should generate mechanisms for improving well-being in the workplace. For example, the model should be able to assess which individuals react most to positive or negative events such as raises in salary. This information might then inform feedback delivery or performance management that aims to improve an employee's well-being. This model is useful in that it considers the dynamic interaction that exists between personal characteristics and intra-individual processes.

Figure 5
Dynamic Well-being Model
Taken from Ilies, Shwind and Heller (2007, p. 332)



This section has explained a few examples of conceptualisations of occupational well-being. In doing so, Fisher's (2014) opinion on the definition of the concept, which is that we appear to have little consensus on how to go about defining and measuring it, is illustrated. Fisher (2014) noted that well-being at work has really meant whatever each researcher defined it as. Terms such as job satisfaction, job involvement, positive and negative affect at work, flow,

work engagement, thriving and affective organisational commitment have been used (Fisher, 2010). To add to the complexity of defining this term, for every researcher that refers to occupational well-being using one of these specific terms, there exists another researcher who argues that the term is merely a component of well-being. While this may initially seem problematic, Fisher (2014) argued that the huge variety of definitions of occupational well-being offers researchers significant scope to broaden the ways that workplace well-being is understood and assessed. It is also a means to encourage the formulation of research on how to maximise this state for employees. Fisher (2014) went on to recommend that any conceptualisation of occupational well-being should intentionally include aspects of eudaimonic well-being and hedonic well-being, as well as an emphasis on social interaction.

4.7.3 Seligman's building blocks of well-being

4.7.3.1 Introduction

Seligman, who has played a role in the development of the positive psychology field, suggested building blocks to psychological well-being. His conceptualisation of these building blocks to psychological well-being has been used to measure well-being at work in several studies on occupational well-being, and thus it was used to as a lens through which to identify participants for this study who have high levels of well-being at work. There are several reasons for this decision. First, the conceptualisation of these building blocks is broad since it is founded in both the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. Thus, I followed Fisher's (2014) recommendation to include both approaches in conceptualising the term. Second, it is framed in operational terms since it contains building blocks that can be clearly measured, namely positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Each of these building blocks has been empirically linked to occupational well-being, as will be shown in this section. Third, the PERMA Profiler, a measure of definition of PWB, was created by Butler and Kern (2016). The workplace version (referred to as the Workplace PERMA Profiler or WPP) was used to identify participants with high levels of psychological well-being at work. This section will explain the elements of this conceptualisation of the term. It will also discuss the various criticisms against PERMA and provide further justification for its use in this study.

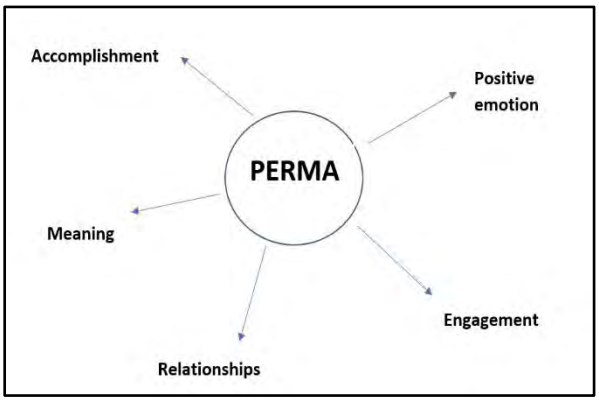
4.7.3.2 Elements to Seligman's model

There are five building blocks or elements to Seligman's (2011) conceptualisation of well-being, which he refers to as PERMA. These are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. This section will show how these elements have been linked to both general well-being and occupational well-being.

Figure 6

PERMA Profiler

(My own copy of the model as described in Seligman, 2011)



Positive emotion represents the hedonic approach to well-being. Positive emotion refers to "the pleasant life" (Seligman, 2011, p. 11) and is defined as happiness, pleasure or comfort. According to Seligman (2011) the presence of positive emotion serves as a marker for well-being. Positive emotion plays a significant role in an individual's general well-being. Howell, Kern and Lyubomirsky (2007) looked at the role of positive affect and life satisfaction on an individual in their research synthesis on the topic. The findings from 150 experimental, longitudinal studies that tested the impact of positive affect on objective health outcomes found that positive affect was related to both short- and long-term health outcomes (physical and mental), and disease or symptom control (Howell et al., 2007). In another investigation into several studies that looked at positive affect, researchers found that happy individuals are more likely than their less happy peers to have superior work performance, good physical health, greater happiness, greater involvement in the community and a long life (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). People who have high levels of gratitude, another form of positive emotion, are more likely to show prosocial behaviour and optimism about life (Froh, Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009). From an occupational perspective specifically, people with high levels of positive emotion at work are also less likely to suffer from burnout at work (Haar & Roche, 2010). Research has found that negative emotions, such as distress, and positive emotions, such as high morale, make contributions respectively to employee well-being, with low levels of positive affect linked to high rates of absenteeism (Cotton & Hart, 2003). Finally, Krueger, Kahneman, Schkade, Schwarz and Stone (2013) noted that positive emotion predicts the quality of work life.

Engagement refers to being completely absorbed in a particular activity, organisation, or cause (Seligman, 2011). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) refers to this as a flow state, defined as immersion

into an intrinsically motivating task. In the organisational world, engagement has been defined in terms of vigour, absorption, and dedication (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). A recent meta study that looked at the results of 49 studies on flow and engagement at work found a strong correlation between these concepts and occupational well-being (Farina, Roderigues & Hutz, 2018). Moreover, flow at work has been linked to higher levels of energy after work (Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag & Fullagar, 2012) and it mediates the connection between attitude at work and occupational well-being (Rivkin, Diestel & Schmidt, 2016). Finally, Peifer, Syrek, Ostwald, Schuh and Anton (2021) found that flow contributes directly to well-being, whereas unfinished tasks decrease a sense of well-being at work.

Relationships refer to the connections we have with others and the community (Seligman, 2011). This facet to PWB includes feelings of being integrated, valued, and supported (Seligman, 2011). Research has consistently illustrated the connection between relationships and good mental and physical health. Cohen (2004) found that social support and social integration are associated with a reduction in the effects of stressful experiences and an increase in positive psychological states. A longitudinal cohort study of 1 604 participants living in a retirement home found that loneliness was strongly correlated with a decline in activities of daily living, decreased mobility, and increased risk of death. A third study that shows the significance of relationships to well-being by Tay, Tan, Diener and Gonzalez (2013) found that social relationships have a positive impact on health behaviours such as suicidal tendencies and the self-management of chronic illness. More specifically to my study, relationships are key in predicting job satisfaction in the workplace. Achor (2012) found that individuals who provide social support in the workplace are more likely to become engaged at work, have better relationships with their colleagues, be satisfied with their jobs, and advance in the workplace. Another study looking at Portuguese nurses found that social support significantly predicted job satisfaction and reduced turnover intention (Orgambídez-Ramos & Almeida, 2017).

Seligman (2011) defines meaning as having a sense of purpose in one’s life. It involves feeling connected to something bigger than oneself. Meaning is a significant contributor to mental health and mood. A large survey conducted by Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker and Garbinsky (2013) found that meaningfulness and happiness were substantially and positively correlated. Meaningfulness at work was the topic of a case study (Carton, 2017) that looked at archival evidence exploring the actions of President John F. Kennedy who was involved with NASA in the 1960s. Carton (2017) found anecdotal evidence that described how Kennedy engaged in specific steps to help employees see a stronger connection between their work (no matter how mundane it was considered) and NASA’s ultimate goals. For example, he reduced

NASA's aspirations to one, narrowing the focus of the employees on one specific goal. The meaning employees put into their work changed dramatically, increasing motivation. Employees started to view their daily work ''not as short-term tasks (I'm building electrical circuits) but as the pursuit of NASA's long-term objective (I'm putting a man on the moon)'' (Carton, 2017, p. 323). Carton (2017) argued for leaders to help their employees not to become dispirited by connecting their day-to-day tasks with the organisation's ultimate aspirations.

The element of accomplishment is about making progress towards one's goals and achieving results. This leads to a sense of accomplishment and recognition (Seligman, 2011). Accomplishment has been found to lead to a meaningful and productive life (Mahajan, A. 2020). This is significant to the workplace. A recent study of 417 educators in the US found an interesting connection between personal accomplishment and perceptions of mattering at work (Richards, Gaudreault & Woods, 2018). They found that a higher connection between the two was correlated with a reduction in perceived isolation at work. Similarly, in a study that looked at well-being in mental health professionals, Veage et al. (2014) found that competence and accomplishment at work was associated with lower levels of burnout and higher levels of well-being.

This section has shown that each of Seligman's facets to psychological well-being have been empirically linked to well-being, not only in terms of general well-being but also occupational well-being. For example, positive emotion (P) has been proven to predict quality of work life (Krueger et al., 2013); engagement (E) has been found to contribute directly to occupational well-being (Peifer et al., 2021); individuals with supportive relationships (R) in the workplace have been proven to be more engaged at work (Achor, 2012); meaningfulness (M) and happiness have been found to be substantially correlated (Baumeister et al., 2013); and accomplishment (A) has been linked to a reduction in perceived isolation at work (Richards et al., 2018). The next section will go on to describe some of the criticisms against PERMA and then offer a response to these criticisms to justify my choice of the PERMA profiler as a measure to identify seafarers with high levels of psychological well-being.

4.7.3.3 Criticism against Seligman's conceptualisation and response

The PERMA conceptualisation of well-being has been the subject of some criticism by other researchers in the field of well-being. One of the initial criticisms was regarding the lack of supporting empirical evidence proving that the conceptualisation is in fact one of well-being. However, there have been recent efforts to address this, with several justifications for Seligman's PERMA conceptualisation being an evidence-based one of both general well-

being and occupational well-being. First, a growing body of research (see for example Disabato, Goodman, Kashdan, Short & Jarden, 2016; Jovanovic, 2015 and Longo, Coyne, Joseph & Gustavsson, 2016) argued that well-being is best understood as one factor consisting of unique facets. Seligman's PERMA is in line with this body of research as it consists of the primary factor of PWB with five facets. Second, the PERMA conceptualisation of well-being has been proven to capture the same kind of well-being as Diener's view of subjective well-being, another very popular conceptualisation of general well-being used in research (Goodman et al., 2018). The researchers proved that both PWB and SWB converge onto a single well-being factor, and that the elements of PERMA are correlated moderately highly with one other. Third, Coffey, Wray-Lake, Mashek and Brannard (2016) found that Seligman's PERMA conceptualisation of well-being is "unique in relation to other well-being theories because it combines intrinsically motivated indicators of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being and includes aspects of well-being that individuals can actively and agentically pursue'' (Coffey et al., 2016, p. 206).

A second criticism relating to the first is that there is a lack of theoretical or empirical rationale for Seligman's choice of the five facets of well-being (Goodman et al., 2018). In response to this criticism, it is pertinent to note that Seligman's five facets of well-being are all strongly rooted in either the hedonic or the eudaimonic tradition, and thus the conceptualisation has a solid foundation in both traditional approaches to well-being. It is also noted that Seligman's conceptualisation is, as argued by Adler et al. (2017) a "dashboard theory and not a final-common-path, monistic approach to human psychological flourishing" (p.118). Seligman (2011) does not propose that PERMA is a one-size fits all view of well-being – there may well be other aspects to the concept. In any case, researchers have advocated for a wide variety of lenses through which happiness and well-being can be studied (see Ryan & Deci, 2001; Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009 and Kashdan et al., 2008). This is because consensus regarding what does and does not constitute well-being is rooted in personal beliefs – people will inevitably value different components to well-being differently (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan & Kauffman, 2020).

A third criticism against PERMA was raised by Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders (2012). They disagreed with Seligman's notion that well-being is a construct, containing various elements. Instead, they argued that well-being is a state of equilibrium that is impacted by challenges or stress (Dodge et al., 2012). They argued that PERMA is far too static because Seligman fails to consider the challenges and stressors of life. In response to this, the buffer hypothesis of occupational stress and well-being substantiates Seligman's decision not to include challenges or stress as a component of PERMA. The buffer hypothesis suggests that positive

factors, such as control over resources at work and social support, buffer the impact of job challenges or work stress on occupational well-being (see van der Doef & Maes, 1999 and Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003). This therefore explains why Seligman's conceptualisation of well-being does not include any constructs pertaining to the challenges or stressors of life.

4.8 Conclusion to chapter

This chapter has explained why PERMA was chosen as a lens through which to view seafarer well-being. In making use of PERMA in my research, I was able to respond to the gap that exists in literature on seafarer occupational health, namely literature that responds to research on mental health with a positive psychology lens. I was also able to ensure that I followed Fisher's (2014) recommendation that any conceptualisation of occupational well-being should intentionally include aspects of eudaimonic well-being and hedonic well-being, as well as an emphasis on social interaction.

This chapter also showed how positive psychology played a role in my research while I remained true to IPA by ensuring that positive psychology and Seligman's conceptualisation of well-being were not used as models that would be tested by my findings. Rather, positive psychology featured in my research in three ways: first, understanding the field helped me to refine my research question. Second, conceptualising psychological well-being helped me to identify an information-rich sample of participants with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being. Third, a comprehensive understanding of positive psychology and well-being aided my interpretation of the data.

PERMA will feature again in chapter six of this thesis, when the recruiting of the study's participants is discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

Surely, this was a touch of fine philosophy.
Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 143)*

5.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter describes the methodology used to answer the research questions, all four of which were focused on understanding the lived experiences of seafarers with high levels of psychological well-being. These questions were outlined in chapter one and are as follows:

Primary research question:

- *What are the lived experiences of a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*

This was then broken down into three sub-questions:

- *How is occupational stress experienced by a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*
- *How is well-being experienced by a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*
- *How do a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB make sense of mental health and mental health interventions?*

This chapter starts with a brief description of the research approach, which was Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The philosophical underpinnings of IPA, namely descriptive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, are then described, along with their application to IPA. The chapter then goes into detail regarding the assumptions and key features of IPA. This chapter also includes a critique of IPA.

5.2 What is IPA?

IPA is an approach to qualitative research that aims to explore and understand the lived experience of a certain phenomenon (Smith, 2004). The approach was first articulated in the 1990s and was initially adopted by the fields of health and counselling psychology (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Since then, it has become one of the most established approaches to qualitative research internationally, particularly in the field of psychology but also in other fields such as education, organisational studies and sports science (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Smith et al. (2009) described IPA as follows:

> *"IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience. And it aims to conduct this examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems" (p. 32).*

In other words, IPA allows for many participants, all of whom experience a certain event or phenomenon, to share their stories in their own words and on their own terms. However, it also acknowledges that the researcher cannot ever fully empathise with the participant or access their world, recognising that ''access depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions, required to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999, p. 218). IPA adopts a dual approach, in which the joint reflections of both the researcher and the participant form the final analysis of the phenomenon under study (Smith et al., 1999).

5.3 Philosophical foundations of IPA

Smith et al. (2009) stated that "IPA is not trying to operationalize a specific philosophical idea, but rather draws widely, selectively, from a range of ideas in philosophy" (p. 6). This range of ideas is taken primarily from two philosophical fields – hermeneutics and phenomenology – and is influenced by the idiographic way of relating to research.

5.3.1 Hermeneutics

The word is derived from the name of a Greek god, Hermes, who was responsible for interpreting and clarifying messages between the gods and human beings (Thompson, 1990). Hermes was said to bring messages from beyond the human realm and translate them into what could be understood by mere mortals (Holroyd, 2007). Taking this into consideration, hermeneutics is defined as the theory and practice of interpreting the meaning in a specific text (Rennie, 1999).

Schleiermacher, a theologian, and primary contributor to the field, postulated that any interpretation of a text must include both a linguistic analysis and a psychological analysis. In this way, both the meaning of the text as well as the motivations of the original author (both intentional and unintentional) would be revealed (Moran, 2002). Smith (2007) argued that this form of analysis is crucial to IPA, as the researcher is then able to bring together the whole

and the part – the whole referring to understanding of the text, and the part referring to understanding the author. In this way, hermeneutics has influenced IPA significantly because researchers using IPA are able to accept that a phenomenon is experienced by an individual in a way that is unique to the individual, yet it is lived in a shared context. Thus, an effective analysis, from the perspective of IPA, finds meaning beyond the claims made by the individual, and thus potentially reveals more about an individual, of which that individual may not even be aware (Smith et al., 2009).

5.3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a general term that encompasses a philosophical school of thought as well as a variety of approaches to qualitative research. It is a style of philosophising about various experiences of phenomena that manifest in the consciousness of the experiencer, with the goal of describing these experiences in the way they appear to the experiencer (Moran, 2002). Essentially, it is the study of the lived experience or lifeworld (van Manen, 1997). Key to phenomenology is this idea that close attention must be paid to how a phenomenon is experienced, as opposed to the phenomenon being described using common sense or the rules and logic of the philosophical tradition (Moran, 2002). Thus, phenomenologists ask individuals: *What is the experience like?* (Valle, King & Halling, 1989) and attempt to unfold descriptions and meanings as they are lived every day. This means that phenomenologists focus on what individuals experience pre-reflectively (Husserl, 1970) without resorting to conceptualisation or interpretation. Phenomenologists argue that in this way, the study of the experiences of phenomena uncovers new or forgotten meaning (Husserl, 1970). Smith et al. (2009) identified four phenomenologists (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre) as leading figures who influenced the theoretical basis of IPA. In fact, Tuffour (2017) argued that the works of these four philosophers complement one another and contribute towards a "mature, multifaceted and holistic phenomenology" (p. 3).

Mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) was a major contributor to, and often considered the father of, phenomenology (Sokolowski, 2000). Interestingly, it was Husserl's attempt to understand scientific and mathematical truths that led to his conceptualisation of phenomenology. As a philosopher, he was critical of the logical scrutiny of phenomena, and the associated quest to analyse their essential meaning, validity and justification (Moran, 2002). In addition to this, he was also critical of the field of psychology, and felt that attempting to apply traditional research methods of cause and effect to human issues had resulted in psychological researchers missing important variables (Husserl, 1970). Instead, he desired to understand and then describe how others experience phenomena on a conscious level, since in his opinion, psychology should consist of descriptions and not causal

explanations (Moran, 2002). Thus, he argued that philosophers and psychological researchers should adopt the principle of pre-suppositionlessness (Husserl, 1999), which is the discarding of theorising on a philosophical level in favour of describing phenomena through what is offered intuitively by the individual who experiences it. Husserl argued that since every individual is aware of being in a world, a world in which space is spread out endlessly, the world and sense of being in the world, therefore, can be experienced consciously from the place where one is standing. (Husserl, 1999). It is from here that the conscious experience of various phenomena unfolds. He referred to this human experience of phenomena as the lebenswelt or lifeworld, emphasising that it is what an individual experiences pre-reflectively, without being subject to interpretation (Husserl, 1970). Moran (2002) described this as key to understanding Husserlian phenomenology, which became known as descriptive phenomenology, and thus the exact goal of descriptive phenomenology is to describe the lived experience of an individual without assigning any meaning to the individual's account (Peat, Rodriguez, Orchid & Smith, 2018). This partly influenced the formulation of IPA in the sense that IPA emphasises the ongoing reflection of the individual's lived experience, rather than exploring the lived experience from the perspective of how it fits within certain criteria (Peat et al., 2018).

Husserl's student, Heidegger, was critical of the descriptive element to Husserl's approach, and argued that descriptive phenomenology is limited in its analysis, not allowing for the interpretation of data. He argued that a description is, in itself, a form of interpretation because it involves engagement with a phenomenon on behalf of the philosopher, and this engagement will always involve interpretation of some form since philosophers are never free from context, personal bias, beliefs and assumptions of their own (Heidegger, 1962). Instead, he advocated for an existential adjustment to Husserl's writings. In doing this, he became one of the first philosophers to combine existentialism, and thus the meaning people ascribe to a phenomenon, with a phenomenological school of thought (Dowling, 2007). Therefore, Heidegger's form of phenomenology (called interpretive phenomenology) evolved from descriptive phenomenology, built on the foundation of his primary argument which is that the significance of phenomenological description lies in interpretation (Heidegger, 1962). Like Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology is concerned with the human experience or lifeworld as it is lived. However, there is a key difference, which can be described by looking into the other name of this approach. Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology is also referred to as hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus, in relation to the study of human experiences of phenomena, interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology involves interpreting and clarifying meaning embedded in these experiences, which may or may not always be apparent to the participants (Lopez & Willis, 2004). A key component to

Heidegger's phenomenology is that every encounter involves an interpretation of some form, which is influenced by a person's background and context. It is this component of interpretive phenomenology that influenced IPA. In other words, researchers engage in an ongoing reflection of the individual's lived experiences, without assigning predetermined criteria; however, the fact that the researcher observes these experiences from their own perspective means that understanding is developed through engagement with and interpretation of the participant's account (Peat et al., 2018).

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty emphasised the interpretive nature of researching the lived experience of a phenomenon (Tuffour, 2017). However, a core difference is in Merleau-Ponty's belief that the individual exists as a bodily being. He believed that it is through perception that the individual understands and engages with the environment and various phenomena (Tuffour, 2017). From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the body plays a pivotal role in knowing about the world and being in the world, and it shapes our fundamental worldview (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, lived experience becomes far more than abstract cognition; meaning is sensed first in the body before it is articulated and then finally labelled through language (Amos, 2016). Language is no longer viewed as a tool, but instead, words are experienced for how they feel (Amos, 2016). Smith et al., (2009) have come to view this contribution to IPA as crucial in the pursuit of qualitative data of lived experiences, since the focus is the individual's embodied experience as it is lived out. For the IPA researcher, this means that the lived experience of a phenomenon can be observed and interpreted, and the researcher could even develop empathy for the participant, but the experience of the phenomenon can never be entirely shared (Smith et al., 2009).

Sartre (1956) extended the understanding of the individual's embodied experience of the world. He argued that we are constantly engaged in an ongoing process of becoming ourselves. He conceptualised a form of phenomenology called existential phenomenology, although existentialism has always been a part of phenomenology. In this way, Sartre differed from other phenomenologists who believed that the self is something pre-existing and waiting to be discovered. From Sartre's perspective, our engagement with the world is unfolding all the time as we discover and interpret the world around us (Satre, 1956). For the IPA researcher, this means that meaning making regarding a certain phenomenon is constantly unfolding as it is being interpreted, both by the researcher and the participant.

5.3.3 Idiography

Idiography is an approach to research that does not seek to generalise results to others or formulate laws based on data. IPA is strongly influenced by idiography. This approach is

concerned with detail, with the distinct and experiences of people, and with the distinct and particular contexts in which they occur (Smith et al., 2009). Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) note that the study of any specific experience or situation is called idiographic as it is then the opposite to the study of things in general. This means that the idiographic researcher tries to find out as much as possible from one case, before moving onto another. IPA draws on this meaning of idiography in the sense that the opinions and perspectives of each person who experiences the phenomenon are valued while at the same time the IPA researcher is also able to obtain a general picture of the experiences of a phenomenon through the lived experiences described by more than one participant (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

5.4 Assumptions underpinning IPA

Creswell and Poth (2016) advised that a key step in conducting rigorous qualitative research is identifying the various philosophical assumptions that the researcher makes in deciding to undertake a qualitative study. The three philosophies already described (hermeneutics, phenomenology and idiography) led to a set of assumptions that underpin any research conducted using IPA. These assumptions, outlined in this section, aligned well with the qualitative research goal of the study, which was to understand the phenomena of well-being, occupational stress, and mental health from the perspective of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB.

5.4.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology is concerned with the nature of being. Heidegger (1962) was concerned with the nature of being but also the meaning of being. He assumed that humans exist in a world that they consistently interpret (Heidegger, 1962). Based on this assumption, Larkin et al. (2006) argued that even though it may be desirable to completely remove ourselves from the world to uncover the experience of a certain phenomenon in the eyes of another, it is not possible to do so. Thus, the IPA researcher assumes that being in the world involves interpreting the world, and that the two cannot be separated. This ontological assumption means that the researcher's focus becomes understanding the phenomenon from the individual's experience, as well as the meaning the individual makes of it, while considering the interpretation the researcher makes of the individual's meaning.

5.4.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Heidegger (1962) assumed that data about what is known is produced through engagement between the participant and the researcher. This engagement involves, in essence, making sense of the participant's sense-making of the

experience of a phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In other words, IPA researchers produce knowledge of a phenomenon by understanding the lived experience of the participant and the meaning they make of it, with the result being an account of how the researcher makes sense of this information (Smith & Orborn, 2003). The researcher can do this because it is assumed that they have expert knowledge, making them valuable guides to inquiry (Heidegger, 1962).

5.4.3 Methodological assumptions

Methodological assumptions are the various assumptions the researcher makes regarding the methods used to conduct qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). On a practical level, this means that interpretive phenomenologists value the role of phenomenological questioning, with the researcher moving beyond gathering the mere description of core phenomena to understand the lived experience of the participant (Heidegger, 1962). This is done through asking questions that elicit stories from the participant. A second way this is done is through asking how-like questions. Irarrázaval (2020) explained that how-like questions can guide participants in describing their lived experiences of a phenomenon, whereas why-like questions are generally aimed at obtaining explanations or opinions of the phenomenon. Idiography also influenced IPA on the methodological level (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA research usually involves detailed and intensive analysis of the accounts of a relatively small number of participants. This means that the sample size in a phenomenological study is kept small, between 10 to 13 participants (Smith & Nizza, 2021).

5.5 Key features of IPA

Several key features of IPA differentiate it from other phenomenological methods of inquiry and serve to bring the philosophical underpinnings to life through practical means. These features are described in this section.

5.5.1 IPA focuses on experiences

The lived experience of a phenomenon is what IPA researchers aim to identify and conceptualise. This is where IPA is influenced by phenomenology specifically. Researchers attend to those aspects of an experience that matter to people and are thus inherently meaningful (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Smith et al. (2009) presented the idea of a hierarchy of experiences, and used the following example to illustrate the range of small parts of an experience to more comprehensive ones:

> *"Imagine that you are about to take a swim in the sea on a hot summer day. You may not be mindful of the pebbles under your feet until you remove your shoes, and then find that you have to hobble the last few steps down to the waterline. You may not be aware of the warmth of the sun on your back, until you begin to anticipate your first bracing contact with the cold water. Momentarily then, you are made aware of the flow of experience; for most of the time, however, you are simply immersed in it, rather than explicitly aware of it. Now imagine that the event has further significance for you: you have been a keen swimmer since childhood but have not swum on a public beach for some years, since undergoing major surgery for a serious health problem. The anticipation of this swim takes on a host of additional meanings. Perhaps you are concerned about the visibility of scars or other changes to your bodily appearance. Perhaps you have been looking forward to this moment for some time, as a marker of recovery, and the return of a lost self. Perhaps you are simply wondering whether you will be able to remember how to swim! In any of these cases, the swim is marked for you as an experience, something important which is happening to you" (Smith et al., 2009, p.2).*

The IPA researcher could focus on the small parts of this seaside experience, for example how it feels to experience the sun's warmth. In addition to this, the meaning of the experience, particularly how the meaning fits within the context of the individual's entire life, will also be of interest to the IPA researcher. All aspects of this experience are important to the IPA researcher, including the individual's desires, feelings, needs, motivations, beliefs and culture (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Because of this, the participant is treated by the researcher as an "experiential expert" (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 9). Also noteworthy from the quote is that significant experiences are more likely to yield data. The focus of this study, therefore, is on collecting experiences significant to the seafarer participant, rather than abstract opinions that may or may not be grounded in experience.

5.5.2 IPA is explicitly interpretive

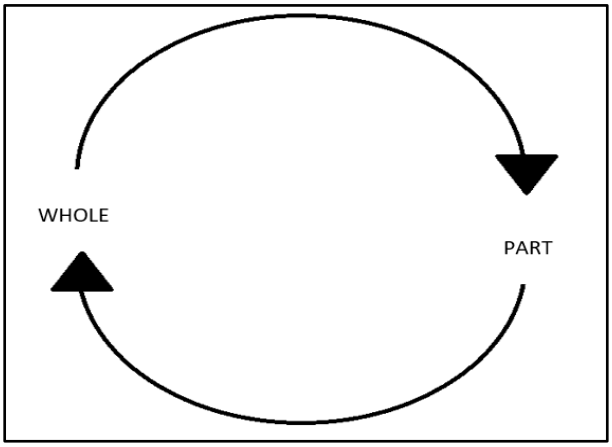
Eatough and Smith (2017) described IPA as an "explicit interpretive endeavour" (p. 12). This is where hermeneutics influenced the formation of IPA. There are three primary ways this interpretive endeavour is realised in practice. First, interpretation is done via the hermeneutic

circle – *Fig. 7.* In essence, the hermeneutic circle, developed by Heidegger (1972), envisions a specific whole in terms of how the various parts interact, firstly, with each other, and then secondly, with the whole (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The IPA researcher gathers meaning from the data by moving between smaller meaning units and larger meaning units. Smith et al. (2009) illustrated the use of the hermeneutic circle by noting that, for example, a single word is an example of a part, and the sentence in which the word is embedded is the whole.

Second, interpretation is done via the notion of appearing. Smith et al. (2009) noted that Heidegger's notion of appearing assumes interpretation to be like detective work. The researcher mines the material for potential meaning through which the phenomenon under study may appear or "shine forth" (Smith et al, 2009, p.35). Mining the material means the texts are examined critically as the researcher's understanding evolves and shifts.

Figure 7

My illustration of the Hermeneutic Circle as described in Heidegger (1972)



A third mechanism of interpretation for the IPA researcher is double hermeneutic interpretation. Double hermeneutic interpretation is when "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them." (Smith et al, 2009, p. 3). In this way, interpretation and understanding are synthesised.

5.5.3 IPA involves bracketing and reflexivity

An important part of the interpretative process of IPA is bracketing. Bracketing involves the researcher temporarily suppressing or silencing their own opinions on the matter, particularly during the interview and initial stages of data analysis (Smith, 2010). It involves effort on the researcher's part to put aside all knowledge, belief, values, and experiences to describe a participant's experiences (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). Bracketing is done practically through

thinking reflexively throughout the research process. Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson and Poole (2004) recommend using a reflexive diary to develop bracketing skills as it brings reflexivity into consciousness through the writing down of thoughts, perceptions and feelings.

5.5.4 IPA views the researcher and participant as experts

The researcher views the participants as experts on their experiences, assuming that these experts can provide a comprehensive understanding of their thoughts and feelings in their own words (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). This means that participants are especially recruited because they are considered to have expertise in the phenomenon under exploration. Because the researcher is also viewed as an expert in their chosen discipline, the researcher and participant work in 'flexible collaboration' (Reid et al., 2005, p. 22).

5.5.5 IPA views cognition as an act of being

The cognitive revolution in psychology came to view cognition merely as information processing (Eatough & Smith, 2017). In other words, thinking about something can be done from a detached stance through mental processes such as attention, memory, and synthesising new information with prior knowledge. IPA, however, views cognition or thinking as "dilemmatic, affective and embodied'' (Smith et al, 2009, p. 91). IPA demonstrates that thinking about significant events and experiences in one's life is an aspect of being in the world and engaging with feelings, moods, and attitudes, rather than a disengaged cognitive activity. Thus, there is an integral and dynamic relationship between what people say, their behaviour, and their thinking and emotional state (Smith & Osborne, 2007). At the same time, the IPA researcher realises that this relationship is complicated, as people are not always able to express their thoughts directly or they may not wish to do so. The implication for the researcher is that a component of the interview should include sense-making or meaning-making, both of which are acts of cognition (Smith et al., 2009).

5.5.6 IPA is case-by-case

The approach to analysis, focusing on each participant's case, makes it idiographic in nature. Everyone's experience is studied within their specific context, before being compared to other participants, or being considered in relation to various theoretical models (Smith & Nizza, 2021).

5.6 The role of the researcher in IPA

Qualitative researchers emphasise the importance of considering the stance and role of the researcher (O'Brien et al., 2014). In studies using IPA as a methodology, the researcher's role

is to examine phenomena through the discovery and interpretation of hidden meaning embedded in the words of the participants themselves (Smith & Flowers, 1999). Thus, the researcher is viewed as an interpreter of data whose understanding of the data empowers them in the process of interpretation (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Other researchers describe this process as one in which the researcher becomes an active participant in the discovery of themes related to the phenomenon under study (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011). This is operationalised by the researcher's use of a reflexive journal. Vicary, Young and Hicks (2016) describe two additional functions of the reflexive journal. First, it establishes some validity in that it produces an audit trail, and second, it records and prompts the learning process that increases the study's transparency.

5.7 Rationale for using IPA for a study on seafarer well-being

There are obviously several other qualitative approaches to research that could have been used to conduct this study. IPA was deemed the most suitable option for a variety of reasons which will be explained in this section.

First, Smith et al. (1999) have suggested that IPA is particularly relevant for health psychology. The reason for this is that it allows for a move away from the medical model of disease to an understanding of the constructed nature of a particular illness or component of health such as mental health (Smith et al., 1999). IPA does this by making space to explore the participant's perception of their experiences of a condition or component of health, and the meanings they assign to them. The researcher is then able to describe and understand the respondent's story of the process by which they have made sense of their experiences. This was deemed important to a study on seafarer well-being, especially one from the perspective of positive psychology. The focus of this study was to move away from a medical model of mental illness in seafarers to explore attitudes and experiences of well-being within the broader context of mental health.

Second, IPA is also cited by Smith et al. (2009) as useful to the field of psychology because of its idiographic analysis. This is because idiographic findings can be connected to extant literature, thus shedding light on existing nomothetic (and thus more general) research (Smith et al., 2009). So many of the studies on seafarer mental health and well-being are nomothetic in the sense that seafarers as a group have been identified as vulnerable to mental illness through quantitative research. Because of this, a methodology that could potentially 'illuminate prior quantitative studies by providing rich and nuanced analyses of constructs of interest' (Smith & Nizza, 2021, p. 4) was deemed especially appropriate.

Third, Reid et al. (2005) identified IPA as being consistent with a positive psychology approach to well-being. They note that this is because participants are given a chance to express their views about quality of life, strengths, coping mechanisms and well-being. Since the aim of this study was to understand the experiences of seafarers with high levels of PWB, despite the tremendous occupational stressors they face, this research method seemed extremely pertinent in meeting this aim.

Fourth, IPA is gaining popularity in medical fields especially because it can provide a great deal of insight for health professionals and carers who have never experienced a specific phenomenon personally (Emery & Andermann, 2020). Understanding the lived experience of someone suffering from a certain health condition can greatly increase a health care professional or carer's ability to empathise with the individual. This advantage to IPA could be extremely useful to shipping company management, who might not have spent time at sea and therefore struggle to understand the unique stressors and threats to well-being faced by seafarers. Increasing the levels of empathy among company management may result in positive changes to policies that are created and implemented by these companies.

5.8 A critique of IPA

5.8.1 Introduction

IPA has been criticised for various reasons. For example, Giorgi (2011) claims that IPA fails to meet scientific criteria since it lacks fixed methodological steps to conduct research. Another criticism is that IPA plays fast and loose with research epistemologies (Sullivan, 2014). This section will address these criticisms, as well as others that have emerged since the formulation of IPA.

5.8.2 Criticisms

A primary criticism against IPA is that it is psychological, not phenomenological, and is therefore unable to offer phenomenological outcomes (van Manen, 2018). To illustrate this point, van Manen used his own phenomenological investigation into childhood secrecy, which is something most children start to experience at around six or seven years of age (van Manen & Levering, 1996). He notes that a psychological analysis of this experience might find some children who hate secrets and see them as lies, and others who treasure them and view them with curiosity. On the other hand, a purely phenomenological analysis of childhood secrecy, the outcome of van Manen and Levering's 1996 study, is described as follows:

> *''...when children begin to keep and share secrets, they double their reality: they now live in an inner and an outer world; children discover that secrets can make them invisible: we experience inner invisibility; to keep a secret from your parent means that you have or know something they do not; secrets-kept may disturb relations of intimacy, secrets-shared may create relations of intimacy; the experience of secrets may be seen in people's physiognomy and behaviour; and so forth'' (van Manen, 2018, p. 1963).*

In this study, van Manen (2018) was able to identify ''intuitively given and grasped themes'' of secret-keeping (p. 1963) which are pre-reflective. Granted, these are different from themes that may emerge from an IPA analysis, which does involve a level of interpretation. This is why van Manen finds IPA problematic; he argues that an IPA study that emphasises interpretation and opinions would identify themes that are reflective. He concludes by arguing that since pure phenomenology is the study of the pre-reflective experience, IPA cannot be considered phenomenological. In his response to van Manen's criticism, Smith (2018) noted that Husserl, father of phenomenology, embraces reflection as a part of the philosophy:

> *While observing, I perceive something; in a like manner, I am often "busied" with something in memory; while quasi-observing, I follow in inventive phantasy what goes on in the phantasied world. Or I reflect, I draw conclusions; I take back a judgement, perchance abstaining from making any judgements at all. I am pleased or displeased, I am glad or sad, I wish, or I will and I do something; or, again, I "abstain" from being glad, from wishing, willing and doing. In all such acts I am present, I am actionally there. Upon reflecting, I apprehend myself as the human being who is there (Husserl, 1982 as quoted in Smith, 2018, p. 3).*

In this quote, Husserl claimed that being in the world and perceiving a phenomenon naturally invariably involves reflection. Smith (2018) then went on to explain that phenomenology embraces a dynamic set of positions on the pre-reflective-reflective spectrum, which means that a legitimate aspect to phenomenological research is therefore reflective. This is also in line with another key phenomenologist, Heidegger, who believed that the lived experience of significant phenomena will naturally involve interpretation or reflection of what is happening

(Heidegger, 1962). Sartre, another philosopher who made significant contributions to the field, illustrates this point with his phenomenological investigation into the conception of becoming ill (Satre, 1956). He noted that the individual's experience starts with a pre-reflective awareness of various sensations to a post-reflective awareness of being ill. He also argued that focusing only on the pre-reflective would have meant a less holistic understanding of the experience of becoming ill. This embracing of both pre-reflection and reflection from participants can indeed be argued as being an advantage to IPA over descriptive phenomenology. The result of a descriptive phenomenological study will normally be in the form of a third person account of the general structure of a phenomenon with IPA, however, taking the form of a more interpretive commentary with both the researcher and the participant's input (Smith, 2009). This is illustrated by Willig's (2007) descriptive phenomenological study into the lived experience of extreme sports. She argues that something significant was lost by the absence of her study participants' voices from her final statement. She notes that it is vital to include, in a study of lived experience, the expressive and emotional dimension of a participant's account and she doubts that her final statement which lacks these dimensions, is capable of truly capturing the lived experience of extreme sport (Willig, 2007).

Tuffour (2017), who conducted a critical overview of the limitations of IPA, also engaged in the debate regarding the role of pre-reflection and reflection in IPA. He explained that since data collection relies on the accounts of the participants, concern has been expressed about participants (and researchers for that matter) having the sufficient verbal skills to communicate the various nuances of their interpretations of their experiences successfully. In other words, there is an assumption amongst some that the strength of an IPA study rests on the verbal skills of the participants and the researcher. In response to this, Tuffour (2017) argued that this criticism is elitist as it insinuates that only those with the 'correct' level of verbal fluency could adequately describe and interpret their personal experiences. Tuffour (2017) did, however, warn that this criticism should be noted by IPA researchers, and extra attention paid to ensure exhaustive data is collected from participants.

Another criticism against IPA has been presented by Sullivan (2014) who claimed that IPA is promiscuous at an epistemological level. In other words, it has an unselective, indiscriminate, casual attitude to epistemology, and is far too pluralistic in its approach. This is a compelling argument because IPA has evolved from a collection of philosophical traditions and these traditions embrace slightly different epistemological assumptions. Shinebourne (2011) rebuffs this by arguing that, while IPA does borrow from different philosophical traditions, and thus different epistemologies, it adheres to a distinct epistemological framework. This framework is

based on the epistemologies of two philosophies, namely hermeneutics and phenomenology, along with a commitment to an idiographic stance. A second argument against this criticism is that IPA is not the only research approach to embrace different epistemologies. Dennison (2019) makes this point in his response to critics of IPA, noting that there is room for pluralistic approaches which include different epistemologies because mixed methods research, which embraces different epistemologies, has long been accepted by qualitative researchers as rigorous and scientific. Sousa (2014) also points out that research quality and integrity need not be compromised if the researcher embraces different perspectives. Instead, epistemological pluralism could offer new opportunities for research focused on human interactions (Dennison, 2019) just as it has done for mixed methods research. As Dennison (2019) explained in his defence of IPA's pluralist stance towards epistemology:

> *''An intermingling of genes can open new avenues of research, enhance reflexive awareness and allow the voice of others to be heard'' (p. 1).*

IPA has also been criticised for its methodology. Giorgi (2011) argues that IPA is unscientific because it lacks clear methodological steps. This is a valid claim – in their articulation of the approach, Smith and Osborne (2008) themselves noted that IPA does not ascribe to a clear method, and that the method they present is not prescriptive but rather:

> *''...a way of doing IPA that has worked for us and our students, but it is there to be adapted by researchers, who will have their own personal way of working'' (p. 67).*

Giorgi (2011), who has played a significant role in the formulation of the descriptive phenomenological research method, argued that saying a method is not prescriptive is an oxymoron, since scientific methods, even interpretive methods, are supposed to be intersubjective, shared by more than one conscious mind. Giorgi (2011) went on to explain that only when research methods are prescriptive, and can thus be reproduced, are they truly scientific. In response to this, Smith (2018) advised against being overly prescriptive when using IPA. Instead, IPA researchers need to discuss the methodology they use as well as the consequences of their choices regarding methodology and they ''cannot lay claim to a single, definitive form of phenomenology because phenomenological philosophy is diverse'' (Smith, 2018, p. 3). This point certainly deserves consideration. Phenomenology is a diverse philosophy – it has already been shown how many variations there are, such as Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology and Satre's existential

phenomenology. It makes sense, therefore, that they would differ in methods and research steps, yet all still converge on one concern – the lived experience of a phenomenon. This has led Smith to note that:

> *''Phenomenology is such a complex and multi-faceted entity. I don't think any one person has the authority to prescribe rules about what does or does not constitute phenomenology and what should or should not be published'' (p. 5).*

In addition to this, Smith (2010) noted that prescribed methods for an IPA study are inappropriate because the interpretive processes and intuition of the researcher are what is pivotal, rather than strict adherence to a set of fixed steps. Because of this, notions of prescribed research steps for IPA appear misplaced (Dennison, 2019).

Giorgi's (2011) argument about the importance of clear methodological steps is certainly worth taking into consideration for my own research. This is advised by Johnson (2017) who writes extensively on the mixing of epistemologies in mixed methods research. He recommends that mixed methods researchers must ''thoughtfully address competing values, methods, methodologies, ontologies, and epistemologies'' (Johnson, 2017, p. 168). Giorgi (2011) cites several phenomenological studies that have not thoughtfully addressed these aspects, with the inevitable result being data that is not scientifically sound. For example, Streseman (2007) started out following Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method, and then substituted a specific step in another phenomenological method formulated by Morse and Field (1995). Giorgi (2011) argued that this made Streseman's (2007) analysis of clinical intuition suspect at best, and that the study violated good practice. Giorgi (2011) cited a second example of poor scientific practice. Snodgrass (2002) investigated the lived experiences of grandmothers who act as surrogate mothers to their grandchildren. Giorgi (2011) identified various errors made by Snodgrass (2002), such as referring to phenomenological reduction as a methodology, rather than a research step, and then following ethnographers Straus and Corbin (1990) in the coding of data. These errors and Giorgi's (2011) notion of the importance of a methodological process that is scientific were both noted in the context of this research. Thankfully, although there is not one prescribed way of conducting an interpretive phenomenological analysis, there are a few options from which to choose, and one of these was followed rigorously in the process of this study, with no mixing of the different options. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

5.8.3 Conclusion

While these academic debates are important to refine the methodology and the methods themselves, the fact of the matter is that many researchers are voting by adopting the methodology. IPA has resulted in a large corpus of literature that has made important contributions to knowledge. This corpus of academic literature certainly speaks for itself.

5.9 Latest changes to IPA

Smith has engaged with the various criticisms against IPA and has used them to improve the research approach. In his latest book on IPA, Smith describes two primary changes to the approach in detail (Smith & Nizza, 2021). These changes were noted and used in this research.

The first change is related to the term used to describe data. Previously, the term used was *emergent themes*. This has now been changed to *experiential statements* (Smith & Nizza, 2021). Smith and Nizza (2021) explain that this is a better term for this stage of the analysis, also emphasising the role of experience in IPA. The second change was clarifying the term *theme* in subsequent stages of the research process. Previously, *emergent themes* were collected to form *subordinate themes*. Smith and Nizza (2021) explain that a collection of experiential statements that are related to one another are now referred to as a *Personal Experiential Theme (PET)*.

These changes are in line with Smith's initial conceptualisation of IPA. As already noted, IPA aims to provide a description of both the participant's experience and their making sense of a phenomenon, while at the same time documenting the researcher's own process of sense-making (Smith et al., 2009). This is quite clearly reflected in Smith's new terminology. The initial experiential statements are clear expressions of a participant's experience or reflection of an experience. A *statement* is a declaration of an idea or opinion. No interpretation is done on behalf of the researcher at this stage; experiential statements are simply declarations of participant's experiences. During the second step of analysis, the researcher starts formulating Personal Experiential Themes. The word *theme* implies a recurring idea, which is something the researcher identifies using a psychological lens to interpret the data during this stage (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, these themes are still based on personal experiences of each of the participants and thus become Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). Once a cross case analysis has been conducted by the researcher, a collection of Group Experiential Themes (GETs) can be collated, which consists of PETs that are similar to one another.

5.10 Quality issues in qualitative research

5.10.1 Introduction

Several qualitative researchers have proposed effective strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research. This was taken very seriously in this research, as it has already been shown in the literature review that robust qualitative research that is scientifically sound is needed to shed light on the topic of seafarer mental health and well-being.

5.10.2 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed three strategies to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative data. The first strategy is credibility. To ensure credibility, I ensured prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with the participants. In other words, I invested sufficient time in the interview process, including follow up interviews with all participants. I encouraged follow up questions and frequently asked participants to provide examples of their opinions, particularly in the form of narratives and anecdotes. I also reviewed the transcripts many times to become data rich. Furthermore, I engaged in member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is a process in which the data collected is fed back to members of the study and I did this with two of the study's participants. I presented the findings to these participants to confirm the ideas. Data triangulation also ensured credibility – I made use of two interviews per participant spaced about a month apart, as well as my own notes from the interviews. My own reflexive diary added to the credibility of the study as I was able to evaluate the project as it developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeping a reflexive diary was extremely helpful in that I was able to acknowledge my own biases and preconceived assumptions that may have influenced particularly the interpretation stage of the research.

5.10.3 Transferability

The second strategy proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is transferability. Transferability in qualitative research has been enhanced by detailing the research methods, contexts, and assumptions that are underlying the study (Seale, 1999). Transferability was further established by describing the context of the participants, and not just their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This ensured that the participants' contexts were understood by outsiders, securing richer descriptions, and understanding.

5.10.4 Dependability

The third strategy is dependability. To ensure dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed an audit trail that is maintained throughout the research process, and this was done thoroughly by keeping a detailed reflexive journal.

5.10.5 Reliability

Reliability in quantitative research refers to the exact replication of the research processes and results (Leung, 2015). This, however, is more challenging in qualitative research where paradigms are diverse and thus this definition of reliability is ‘‘epistemologically counter-intuitive’’ (Leung, 2015, p. 325). For qualitative research, the issue of reliability lies more in consistency. Reliability (or consistency) was thus controlled by ensuring that the interview schedule was partly structured and well-planned, as recommended by Cohen (2004). Although the nature of the conversation was spontaneous and fluid, all the interviews followed the same basic structure, with the same questions, ensuring consistency and therefore contributing to reliability.

5.11 Ethical issues

Sales and Folkman (2000) proposed five moral principles on which research with human participants should be based to ensure research that is ethically-sound. These include respect for persons and their autonomy, justice, beneficence and non-maleficence, trust, fidelity and scientific integrity. These ethical principles, discussed further in this section, guided my entire research process and my decisions related to the participants.

Respect for an individual’s autonomy refers to the right every individual has to choose whether to engage in the research process (Sales & Folkman, 2000). I ensured that the consent letter contained a detailed explanation of the research goals, how the research would be disseminated, and any potential risks to participants. Interview participants were informed of issues relating to consent in writing and required to sign documents related to consent before the interview started. They also signed for consent to video record the interviews, and they gave me verbal consent before the recording started for this to occur. They were advised that they could withdraw at any stage from the interview, without explanation, and that if they felt any discomfort during the interview, the interview would immediately be terminated.

Justice was ensured primarily through procedural justice (Sales & Folkman, 2000) which is how adequate systems and procedures at all stages of the research process are fair. No

participants were exploited in any way. All components of the research process have been clearly defined and justified in this thesis.

Beneficence and nonmaleficence include conducting research that does not put the participants at risk in any way (Sales & Folkman, 2000). Participants were made aware of the fact that there was some risk in participating in the research process because it might elicit concerns about their own mental health. This risk was mitigated by ensuring that each participant was aware of resources and helplines to which they could turn if they felt vulnerable. The participants were also informed that they could decline to respond to any question if they felt uncomfortable. I also planned to refer any interview participants to a free mental health helpline specifically for seafarers if they showed signs of distress in the interview. None of the participants, however, ended up showing any significant sign of distress in their interviews.

Trust (Sales & Folkman, 2000) was established with the participants by starting the interview with an explanation of how I would be protecting the information they shared with me through confidentiality and strict protection of the interview recordings and transcripts. I also ensured they were able to trust me by reassuring them that only my supervisor and I would have access to the interview transcripts, along with the transcription service who followed a strict confidentiality policy, and that there would be no identifying factors in the final report.

Fidelity and scientific enquiry is the final ethical principle outlined by Sales and Folkman (2000). They define it simply as “doing good science” (p. 8). This was done by following the steps for phenomenological research as outlined by Smith and Nizza (2021).

Apart from strict adherence to these principles, ethical clearance to conduct my research was sought and granted by the Rhodes University Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee. The Rhodes University Ethical Guidelines for Human Subjects outlines several ethical principles, all of which were adhered to. These include obtaining consent, which was done for both phases of research, confidentiality, protection of participants, and allowing freedom to withdraw from the research process without explanation.

5.12 Conclusion to chapter

This chapter has presented a contextual framework for conducting my research. In describing the methodology in a separate chapter (rather than including the research design as well) I have made the assumptions and philosophical foundations underpinning my research

abundantly clear. This was essential to ensuring that the study had a high degree of methodological coherence. The next chapter will go into further detail regarding the specific research design, and the steps followed to conduct a rigorous IPA study, as recommended by Smith and Nizza (2021).

CHAPTER SIX: METHOD

I began to congratulate myself on a little plan that had occurred to me just before the sailors entered.

Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 743)*

6.1 Introduction to chapter

The previous chapter described the methodology of an IPA study, clarifying the philosophical underpinnings of this way of conducting research and clarifying the theoretical assumptions needed to ensure rigorous research. This chapter builds on the previous one by explaining how these theoretical assumptions manifested practically in the conducting of my research. These assumptions guided the research design or structural framework of specific methods and techniques, such as the formulation of research goals, the creation of an interview schedule, the identification and recruitment of participants, and the collection of data.

6.2 Research design

This study used IPA to analyse semi-structured interview data that was gained from a small sample of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB. This section describes the steps taken in the IPA research process as suggested by Smith and Nizza (2021).

6.2.1 Identify research goals

Given that the research suggests that seafarers face a myriad of occupational stressors that could have a negative impact on their psychological well-being, two goals were identified for this study. The first goal was to add to the knowledge base on seafarer mental health by investigating the personal experiences of seafarers who cope with many occupational stressors yet experience reportedly high levels of well-being regardless. Since seafaring is a career enjoyed by many men and women, despite their experiencing significant threats to their well-being, discovering what helps them with regards to well-being and how they experience stressors might assist the industry in understanding how psychological health-related risks and stressors for the individual seafarer can be minimised. The second goal of the study was to have a personal impact on seafarers themselves in three ways. First, by identifying practical strategies that they could take towards increasing their well-being. Second, by giving a voice to these individuals whose career involves a great deal of sacrifice, of which the general public is often unaware. Third, by understanding the stigma of mental health in the industry and how these seafarers have experienced and made sense of mental health interventions they may have come across.

6.2.2 Clarify research questions

IPA researchers are more focused on the *how* than the *why* of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). This means that research questions should be exploratory, open and directly aimed at how participants make sense of the phenomenon under study (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). They should also be framed broadly, with no attempt to prove or disprove any hypothesis or predetermined theory (Smith & Osborne, 2008).

The research questions were thus formulated as follows:

Primary research question

- *What are the lived experiences of a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*

This was then broken down into three sub-questions:

- *How is occupational stress experienced by a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*
- *How is well-being experienced by a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB?*
- *How do a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB make sense of mental health and mental health interventions?*

Three of my four research questions included the word ‘‘experience’’. This was to ensure that all parts of my study would focus on experiences, rather than opinions.

6.2.3 Decide on a sampling scheme and select sample

Purposeful sampling was deemed the most appropriate sampling scheme for this study. Purposeful sampling is defined as a sampling technique that identifies information-rich participants who are especially knowledgeable about or have experienced a phenomenon, in this case, well-being at work (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). One form of purposeful sampling is criterion sampling, described by Patton (2002) as a sampling scheme used to identify and then select cases that meet important criteria, again in this case, seafarers who have reportedly high levels of PWB. Patton (2002) goes on to note that this can be done in qualitative research using a standardised questionnaire which identifies participants for more in-depth follow-up.

To identify information-rich participants, I approached seafarers whom I have met in my initial exploration of the field, and requested their assistance with completing a short, standardised questionnaire, and distributing it to their friends or colleagues. The spreading of the questionnaire was thus facilitated by these initial participants. Some of these participants posted the questionnaire on their own social media platforms, such as their personal LinkedIn profiles. These initial individuals were made aware that they did not need to provide me with any names, and they had the freedom to decline completing the questionnaire and passing it on to others. The questionnaire included information related to consent, and participants were asked to indicate consent before starting the questionnaire.

The questionnaire I used was the Workplace PERMA Profiler (WPP). This is a psychometric tool that measures PERMA (Seligman's five pillars of well-being, as conceptualised and discussed in Chapter four of this thesis) at work, developed by Kern (2014). The WPP consists of Seligman's five facets of well-being across 15 items, and eight additional items to measure negative emotion, happiness, health, and loneliness at work to make a total of 23 items. Items were scored using a Likert scale of 1 to 10. This measure is freely available for use – www.permahsurvey.com. The participant responses were captured on an excel spreadsheet and added to provide a participant score out of 230 (23 multiplied by ten, the highest possible score for each item). This was converted to a percentage and the 13 highest percentages selected. Those participants were contacted for interviews, if they had indicated consent to be contacted. Two of the highest scores were from participants who had not indicated consent to be contacted for further interviews, and thus the next highest score was chosen. The questionnaire included resources (helplines) for respondents to use if they felt discomfort or distress because of responding to the questionnaire, or if they realised that they needed support with their mental health. Therefore, I did not feel it was necessary to contact those participants whose scores indicated very low self-reported well-being, since they had already been sign pointed to resources that could support them with mental health and well-being.

All respondents who showed scores on the WPP of 9 (the highest score on the WPP interpreted as a *very good* level of workplace well-being) were then grouped together. The sample size for the interviews was carefully considered. Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994) advised choosing samples of between six and 13 for phenomenological research. Thus, the size of the sample consisted of 13 participants. There were many questionnaire respondents who showed reportedly high levels of psychological well-being on the WPP and were thus potential options for the study. However, because the sample scheme was purposive, I was able to make specific decisions regarding the sample and thus I included a variety of nationalities and a small percentage of women (n=4). The interviewees also needed to be

fluent in English, as this was the language in which the interview would be conducted. It was important that the interviewees would have the verbal fluency to communicate perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

Inclusion criteria required that interviewees:

a. *be verbally fluent in English.*
b. *be willing to voluntarily participate in the study in the form of two interviews of an hour each, online.*
c. *be available for at least two interviews on an online platform of their choice in the months of November and December 2020.*
d. *have a reportedly high level of PWB as determined by a score of 9 on the WPP.*

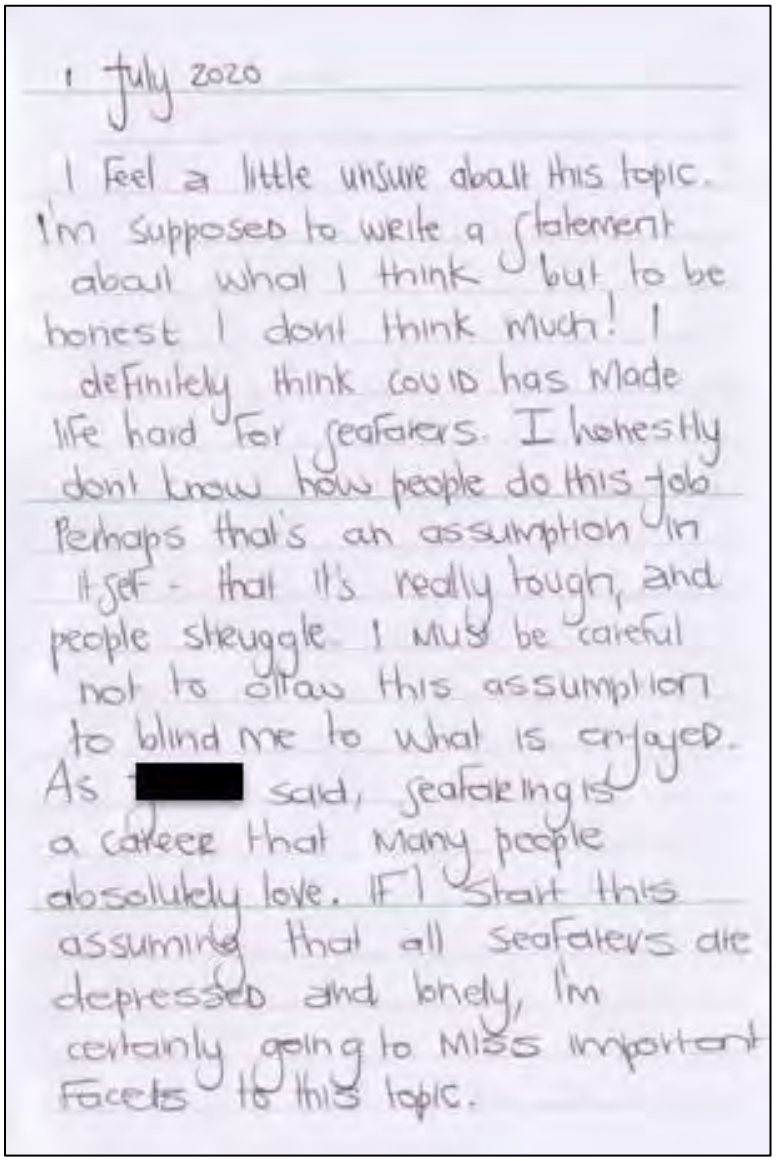
Participants were asked on the final item of the questionnaire if they would be willing to participate in two one-hour interviews online with me over November and December 2020. It was made clear that this was completely voluntary. They were free to choose a *No* response to this question or to respond with *Yes*, and then provide their contact information in the form of an email address. The 13 participants were contacted via the email address they provided on the questionnaire. They were asked if they would be willing to partake in two one-hour interviews on an online platform of their choice. If they responded to the email, further information in the form of detailed consent forms were sent to them via email. Once they had indicated consent, a time, date and online platform convenient to them were chosen for the interview.

6.2.4 Write a personal statement

Apart from a reflexive journal, Smith and Nizza (2021) recommend writing a personal statement before collecting any data. In this statement, the IPA researcher should record current thoughts and beliefs about the topic under study. Being explicit about perceptions of the topic is an effective way to bracket these perceptions before engaging in interviews (Smith & Nizza, 2021). My personal statement, handwritten in my reflexive journal on 1st July 2020, a few months before the interviews and after my completion of the literature review, is shown in *Fig. 8*.

Figure 8

Personal statement before interviews



1 July 2020

I feel a little unsure about this topic. I'm supposed to write a statement about what I think but to be honest I don't think much! I definitely think covid has made life hard for seafarers. I honestly don't know how people do this job. Perhaps that's an assumption in itself - that it's really tough, and people struggle. I must be careful not to allow this assumption to blind me to what is enjoyed. As [redacted] said, seafaring is a career that many people absolutely love. If I start this assuming that all seafarers are depressed and lonely, I'm certainly going to miss important facets to this topic.

6.2.5 Data collection

The next step was to design qualitative data collection protocols. I made use of multiple sources for collecting the qualitative data from the 13 participants to add to the rigour of the study. First, I conducted in-depth online interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. Second, I kept reflection notes (in my reflexive diary) on each participant's non-verbal communication throughout the interview as well as my own feelings and thoughts that arose. This was also possible since the recordings were video recordings, and I was able to watch the interviews. Third, I conducted online follow-up interviews with each of the participants to secure as well as clarify additional information regarding emerging themes. One of these follow-up interviews was done via email as the participant had limited connectivity at sea.

I found the semi-structured interview technique to be extremely useful in the collection of data. Semi-structured interviews are conducted using open-ended questions which set parameters regarding the topic to be discussed (Britten, Jones, Murphy & Stacy, 1995). This interview style enabled me to stay on topic with the participants, but also afforded me a degree of freedom to ensure the interview was spontaneous enough to elicit rich descriptions of what the participants felt was significant. In addition, Smith and Osborne (2007) noted that one of the best ways to conduct a phenomenological interview to ensure the collection of quality data is by using a semi-structured technique, because this style lends itself to a more flexible data collecting process. I also focused on creating a rapport with the participants in order for open and relaxed dialogue to occur naturally and spontaneously.

Despite the semi-structured technique, I made use of a well-planned interview schedule. The reason for this is that even though encouraging flexibility and spontaneous dialogue is the primary objective in phenomenological interviews, Smith and Osborne (2007) stressed the importance of the researcher going into the interview with a well-planned interview schedule. They argued that it ensures the researcher thinks explicitly about what the interview may cover, as well as difficulties that may be encountered or sensitive situations in which wording needs to be well-formulated. They also recommended that sensitive issues should be broached later on in the interview (Smith & Osborne, 2007) and thus questions about mental health were left until last.

With regards to specific interview questions, Smith and Nizza (2021) recommend that questions should be expansive and open, using words such as how and what. They also caution against including assumptions in one's interview questions. Smith and Nizza (2021) also advise that for an interview of about an hour, approximately six questions are appropriate. I decided on five questions, as I wanted to ensure that I had adequate time to build a rapport with the participants, and I felt this may take slightly longer since the interviews were online and not in person. I also ensured that I had included a variety of ways to ask the same question to ensure the answers remained focused on experiences and sense-making. Smith and Nizza (2021) suggest starting with a broad descriptive question concerning an experience, as this breaks the ice, and move onto more analytical or evaluative questions. This is why my first question was broadly focused on the experience of working as a seafarer. Once rapport was established, I then moved on to more complex questions, which involved occupational stress and mental health, topics that may have been of a more sensitive nature for participants.

The questions in *Table 1* comprised the interview schedule.

Table 1

Interview Schedule

Number	*Question*
1	What are your experiences of life as a seafarer? Could you share one a memorable experience with me? What is it like being a seafarer?
2	What are your experiences of personal well-being at sea? Could you share an example when you felt you handled a stressful situation at sea in a way that was effective?
3	Have you ever felt particularly stressed because of your career at sea? Could you provide a specific example?
4	Have you experienced any kind of mental health intervention? What was it like when you attended the course/presentation etc?
5	Tell me about a time when someone was the victim of discrimination on board because of their mental health. What was it like for you? Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your mental health and if so, do you have an experience you might like to share?

Before I started asking any questions, I thanked the participant for their time, and explained issues related to consent, as well as the reason for the study and what would be done with the data. All participants were made aware of the fact that what they said might be quoted verbatim in the final paper, and that they would be not identifiable in any way.

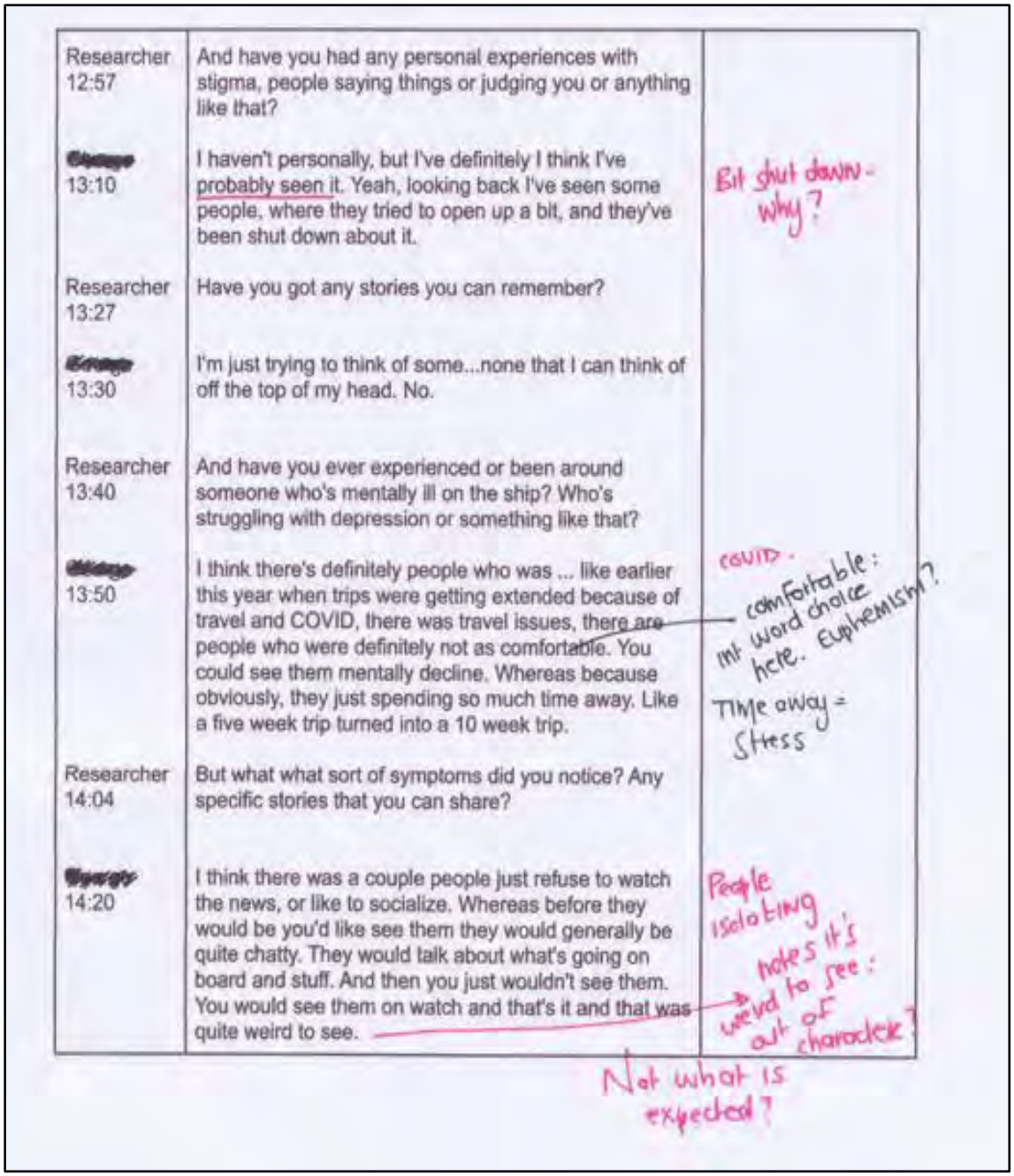
All 13 participants gave permission for me to record the interview before I started the interview. They were also made aware that it would be a video recording, not just an audio recording.

My interview schedule included questions that primarily focused on collecting experiences, such as *What are your experiences of life as a seafarer? Could you share one a memorable experience with me?* During the interviews themselves, if a participant shared an opinion, I would probe for more information on the opinion, hoping to get instead something in the form of an experience or to see whether the opinion is based on experiences. This is illustrated in

the image below which shows an extract from one of the transcriptions. As can be seen from the exchange between the participant and me in *Fig. 9*, I continued probing to elicit an experience of mental health rather than an opinion.

Figure 9

Interview transcription showing questioning for experiences and not opinions



Researcher 12:57	And have you had any personal experiences with stigma, people saying things or judging you or anything like that?	
[redacted] 13:10	I haven't personally, but I've definitely I think I've probably seen it. Yeah, looking back I've seen some people, where they tried to open up a bit, and they've been shut down about it.	Bit shut down - why?
Researcher 13:27	Have you got any stories you can remember?	
[redacted] 13:30	I'm just trying to think of some...none that I can think of off the top of my head. No.	
Researcher 13:40	And have you ever experienced or been around someone who's mentally ill on the ship? Who's struggling with depression or something like that?	
[redacted] 13:50	I think there's definitely people who was ... like earlier this year when trips were getting extended because of travel and COVID, there was travel issues, there are people who were definitely not as comfortable. You could see them mentally decline. Whereas because obviously, they just spending so much time away. Like a five week trip turned into a 10 week trip.	COVID. comfortable: int word choice here. Euphemism? Time away = Stress
Researcher 14:04	But what what sort of symptoms did you notice? Any specific stories that you can share?	
[redacted] 14:20	I think there was a couple people just refuse to watch the news, or like to socialize. Whereas before they would be you'd like see them they would generally be quite chatty. They would talk about what's going on board and stuff. And then you just wouldn't see them. You would see them on watch and that's it and that was quite weird to see.	People isolating makes it's weird to see: out of character? Not what is expected?

Probing and asking for specific experiences resulted in this participant sharing about a few seafarers on board with him who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, refused to watch the news,

refused to socialise and who seemed to isolate themselves quite considerably from the other crew members.

The interviews were transcribed with the use of a transcription company. I made sure that the company received the confidential file the day after the interview, so that transcription could take place as quickly as possible. This was so that I could read over the interview transcriptions while the interview was still fresh in my mind, to ensure that nuances in tone and expression were not lost. Once I received the transcription, I would scan through the transcript and watch the video recordings to check the accuracy of the transcription, an essential step recommended by Smith and Nizza (2021). Doing this also served as the first step to become immersed in the transcriptions, which is a prerequisite for good IPA (Smith et al., 2009). I also specifically requested that each transcript was typed with double spacing and wide margins to allow for comprehensive notetaking.

Unfortunately, the recording of the interviews with a male participant from India was very poor. In addition to this, the participant (who speaks Hindi as his home language) speaks English with an accent which made what he was saying difficult to follow in an online interview with poor audio quality. The transcriber struggled to understand the majority of what was said, resulting in a transcription that did not seem to be an accurate documentation of our conversation. It was decided not to include the two interviews with this participant in the final data analysis to ensure the veracity of the study. Thus, the final analysis was of the experiences of 12 participants, and not 13 as originally intended.

6.2.6 Analyse the data

Before I started this stage, I needed to decide the medium used to conduct the analysis in the first place – either by hand or by using a data analysis computer software programme. I initially started using NVIVO as I felt it would produce more reliable results. However, I quickly came to the realisation that this was limiting my interaction with the data, and I felt I was missing important information. Smith and Nizza (2021) recommend conducting the analysis by hand on hard copies of the transcripts. They recommend that researchers who are still learning the ropes with regards to IPA should rather conduct the analysis in this way. Once I started analysing hard copies of the transcripts, I quickly saw the value in doing it by hand. I felt more engaged with the data as I read each transcript repeatedly.

Smith and Nizza (2021) list fundamental principles for analysing data, all of which were kept in mind during analysis of the interviews with the 12 participants.

- The process is inductive, and free from theoretical constraints. This means that conclusions or findings are based on what is found in the data, rather than testing existing models or theories.
- The process is iterative so that each phase can lead to the researcher potentially revising prior interpretations.
- The researcher must remember that the process is double hermeneutic. In other words, the researcher must capture not just descriptions of the participant's experience, but also how the participant makes sense of their experiences.

Practically, and to ensure I met these principles, I ensured that I analysed each transcript on its own and waited a few days before I moved on to another transcript. I was also sure not to look simply for themes that may have emerged in other transcripts each time I approached a new transcript. Only once I had analysed each transcript independently, I engaged in an analysis of the convergence and divergence of each of the participant's accounts.

This meant that each transcript was subjected to the following procedure:

Step one in the procedure involved my active engagement with the data through watching the interview video recordings and re-reading the transcripts line by line.

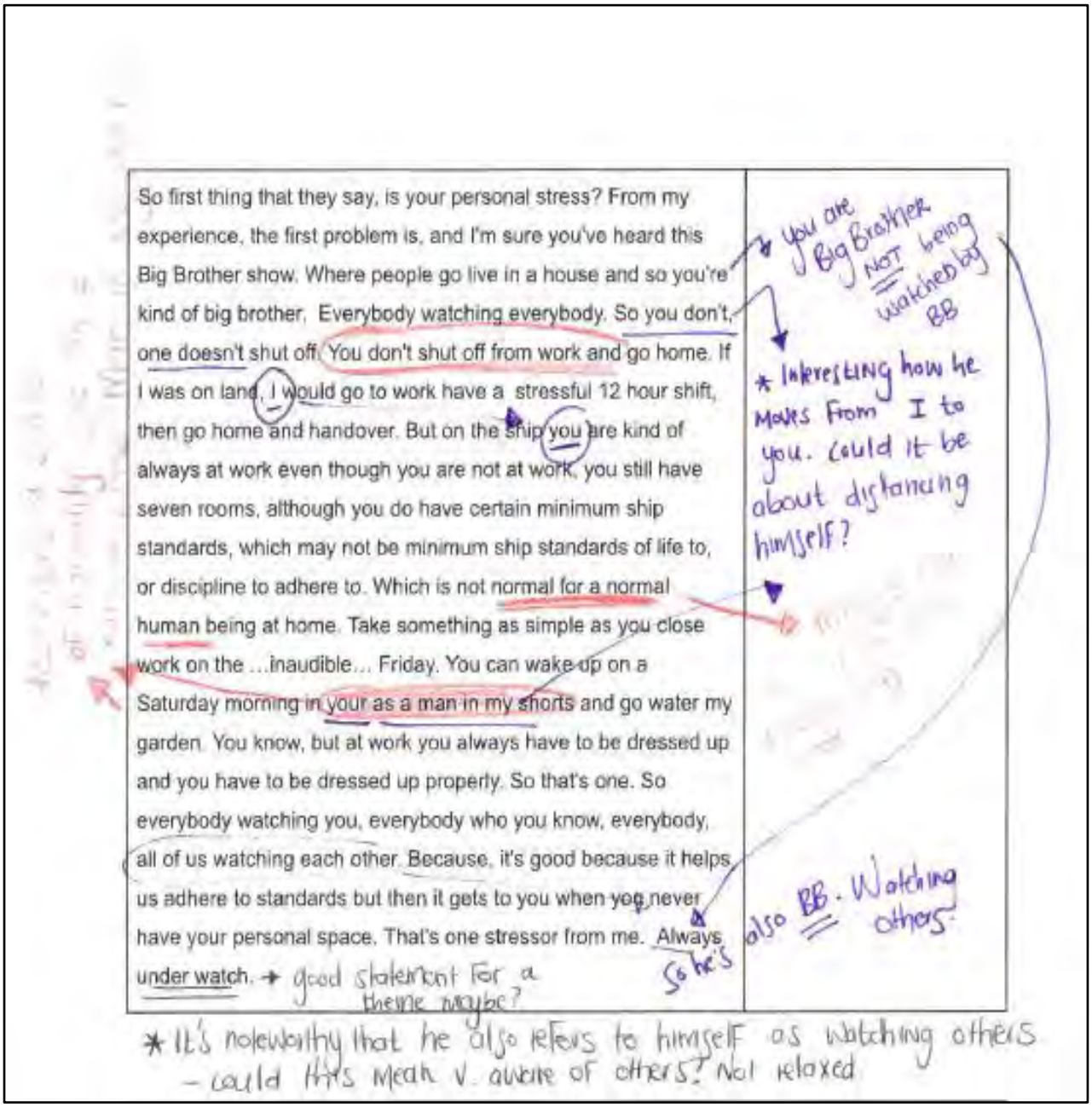
Step two involved initial noting. In the left-hand margin of each transcript, I made notes regarding language use, phrases, metaphors, and descriptions. I followed Smith et al. (2009) who recommended differentiating between descriptive notes, linguistic notes, and conceptual notes. This process was followed with each transcript in preparation for the identification of experiential statements.

As noted, there are different kinds of notes that the researcher can make, as recommended by Smith et al. (2009). Descriptive notes refer to those when a participant describes things that matter to them, such as objects, events, experiences, processes, locations, and principles (Smith & Nizza, 2021). My descriptive notes were written in red/pink pen. Linguistic notes focus on language. Smith and Nizza (2021) advise looking for various aspects of language such as pronoun use, verb tense, repetition, hesitation, and laughter. Looking closely at the words and language structure of the participants contributes to the IPA researcher's analysis of what the experience means for the participant (Smith & Nizza, 2021). My linguistic notes were written in a purple pen. Conceptual notes shift away from the direct experiences of the participants and move towards considering both the participant and the researcher's understanding of what is being said (Smith et al., 2009). My conceptual notes were written in

black pen. Classifying my comments in this way was extremely useful not only to my analysis but also to organising the data. *Fig.10* shows a section of a transcription with various notes written in the column on the right.

Figure 10

Transcription Extract Showing Analysis 1

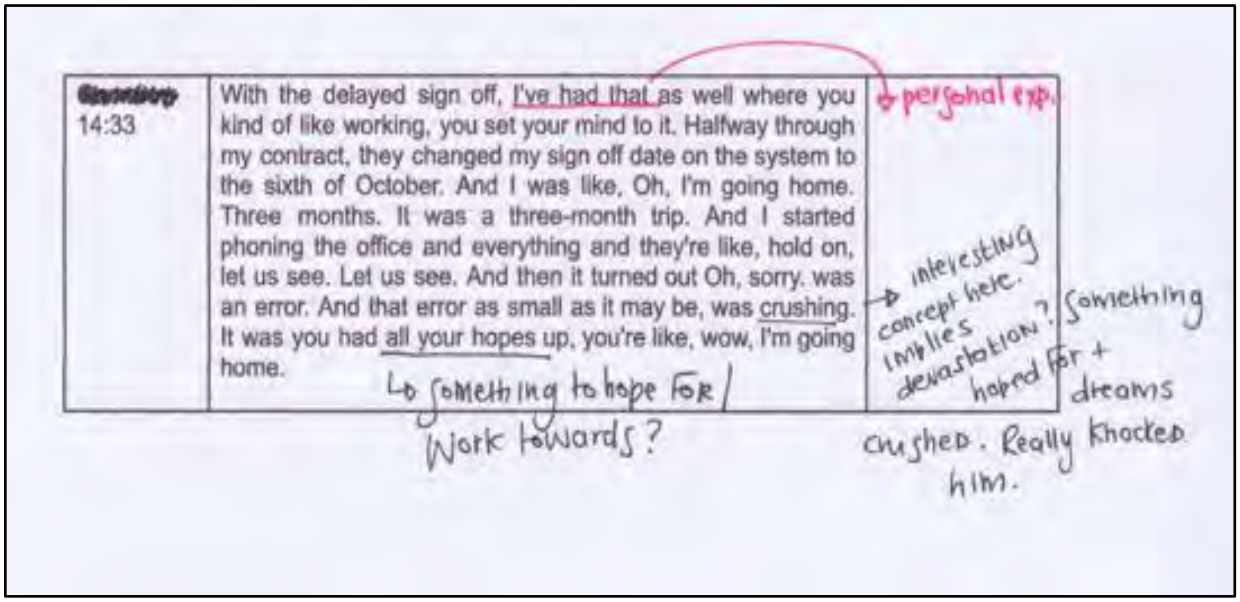


To ensure that I entered the hermeneutic circle in my analysis of the data, I reread each transcription as a whole numerous times, even as I was engaging in analysis of the transcription. This was important as the context was slightly different for each participant. I

also used the hermeneutic circle when I considered the meaning of individual words within the context of the participant, as illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Transcription Extract Showing Analysis 2

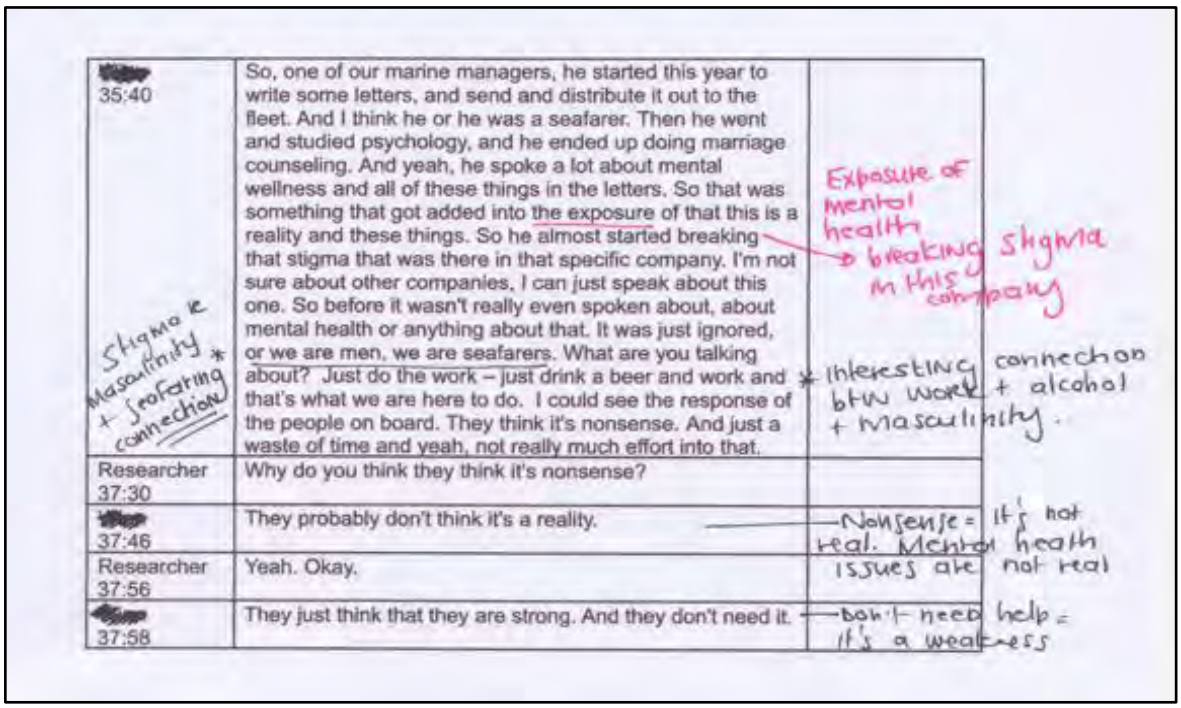


The context here is delayed sign off. When I read this, I noted that a highly emotive word (crushing) was used to describe this stressor. Once I had analysed the entire transcription, I considered the word in relation to the whole transcript and realised that this participant had not described any other stressor using words that communicated this level of distress. This informed my understanding of the severe impact of this stressor on this participant, and what it potentially means for him. *Fig.12* shows a third extract from a transcription with further evidence of my interpretation and how I made use of hermeneutic circle to analyse words such as nonsense.

The third step involved the identification of experiential statements, which was done by looking for the central idea in the exploratory notes taken of the first participant. Smith and Nizza (2021) advise that experiential statements need to be ‘‘both dense and rich – pointing to both the important psychological process and the context and content of that process being invoked by the participant’s response’’ (p. 39). I then divided the experiential statements into clusters according to connections I felt were appropriate, which was based on similarity of ideas or concepts expressed. This is where the interpretation component to IPA really begins. Smith et al. (2009) recommended the process of abstraction, which involves putting similar extracts together and then developing a title or label for the cluster of extracts.

Figure 12

Transcription Extract Showing Analysis 3



[redacted] 35:40	So, one of our marine managers, he started this year to write some letters, and send and distribute it out to the fleet. And I think he or he was a seafarer. Then he went and studied psychology, and he ended up doing marriage counseling. And yeah, he spoke a lot about mental wellness and all of these things in the letters. So that was something that got added into the exposure of that this is a reality and these things. So he almost started breaking that stigma that was there in that specific company. I'm not sure about other companies, I can just speak about this one. So before it wasn't really even spoken about, about mental health or anything about that. It was just ignored, or we are men, we are seafarers. What are you talking about? Just do the work – just drink a beer and work and that's what we are here to do. I could see the response of the people on board. They think it's nonsense. And just a waste of time and yeah, not really much effort into that.	Exposure of mental health → breaking stigma in this company Stigma & Masculinity + Seafaring connection * * Interesting btw work + alcohol connection + masculinity.
Researcher 37:30	Why do you think they think it's nonsense?	
[redacted] 37:46	They probably don't think it's a reality.	Nonsense = it's not real. Mental health issues are not real
Researcher 37:56	Yeah. Okay.	
[redacted] 37:58	They just think that they are strong. And they don't need it.	don't need help = it's a weakness

Once I had clusters of experiential statements, I was able to name each cluster as a personal experiential theme (PET). Smith and Nizza (2021) note that the aim with IPA, in keeping with an idiographic commitment, is to treat each case on its own terms, almost as if each case is the first case I examined. This involved my bracketing any assumptions I may have developed from the preceding cases I had analysed. Once I had 12 tables of PETs, one for each participant, I was able to start comparing cases. Comparing the PETs from each participant involved looking for connections, similarities, and differences. The results of my comparison gave rise to a selection of group experiential themes, and these formed the starting point for writing up my findings (Smith & Nizza, 2021).

Smith et al. (2009) note that IPA is a cyclical process with a continual revisiting of the transcripts. I thus revisited the transcripts continually throughout various steps. This constant revisitation ensured that the group experiential themes that I generated related to the participants' shared lived experiences.

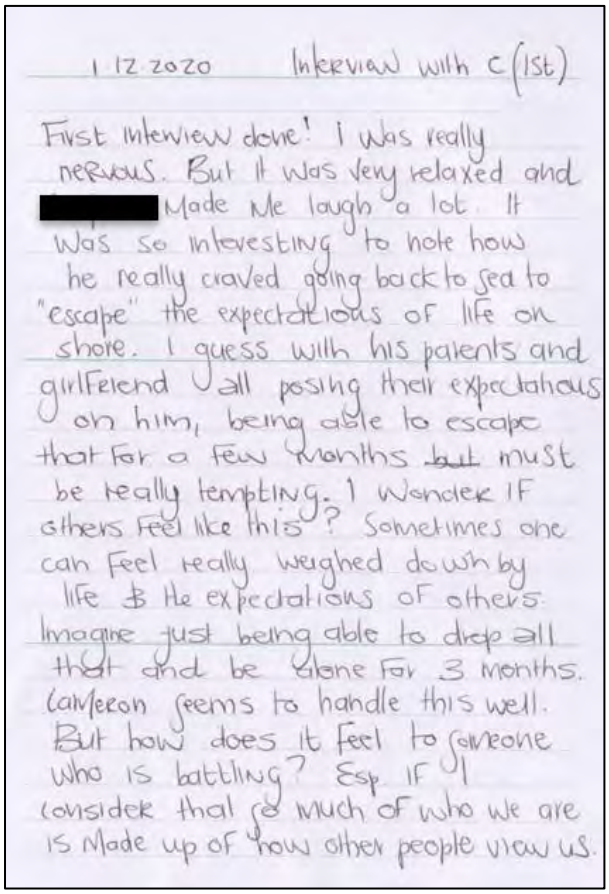
A table of experiential themes and sub-themes is presented in the next chapter.

6.3 My reflexive journal

Throughout my research I kept a reflexive journal where I recorded thoughts, hunches, assumptions, feelings and new realisations. This was especially useful to my becoming aware of my own assumptions and preconceptions regarding well-being in the maritime industry. I was then also able to document them in an intentional manner, something Larkin and Thompson (2012) emphasise as extremely valuable to IPA research. One of the ways I did this was by engaging in a reflexive read of the initial data, free of coding or analysis. I found this helped me to give a voice to my assumptions and any automatic responses. For example, I was surprised when reading about identity in the lives of seafarers. I had not expected the dual worlds in which they live to have such an impact on them psychologically, to the point that their identities are impacted – this, of course, will be discussed further in the findings section. This highlighted for me how little I understood about living in two different environments for months at a time. I was also surprised at the role of food on board – while I expected food to play a role, I did not anticipate the various ways that food can motivate or demotivate a crew. *Fig. 13* shows my entry after my first interview.

Figure 13

Extract 1 from Reflective Diary – written after first interview



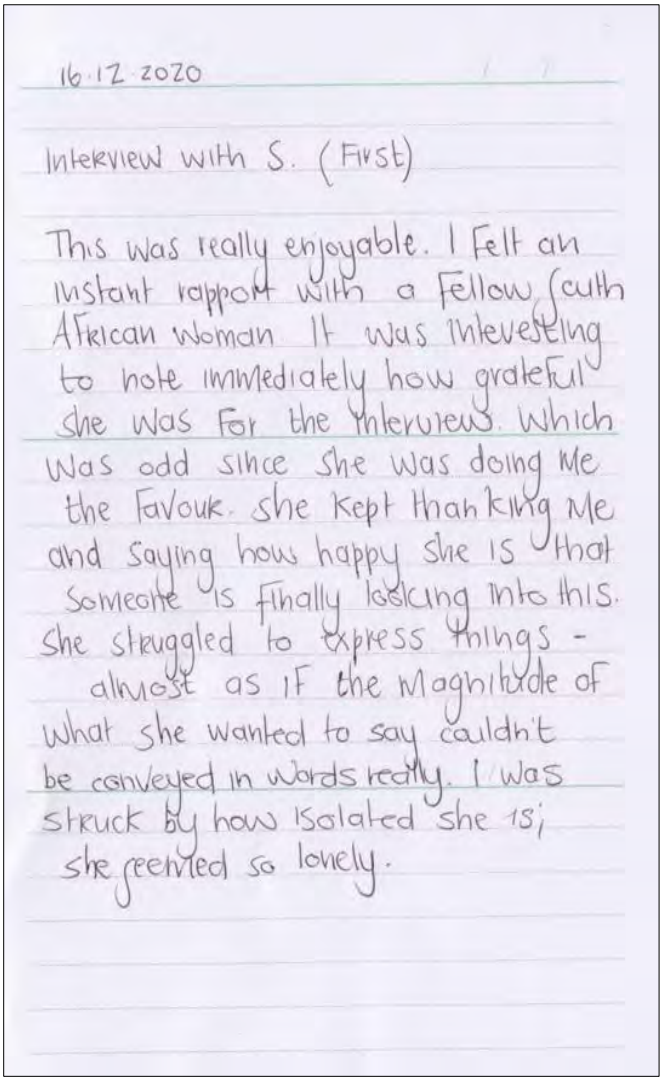
1.12.2020 Interview with C (1st)

First interview done! I was really nervous. But it was very relaxed and [redacted] made me laugh a lot. It was so interesting to note how he really craved going back to sea to "escape" the expectations of life on shore. I guess with his parents and girlfriend all posing their expectations on him, being able to escape that for a few months but must be really tempting. I wonder if others feel like this? Sometimes one can feel really weighed down by life & the expectations of others. Imagine just being able to drop all that and be alone for 3 months. Cameron seems to handle this well. But how does it feel to someone who is battling? Esp. if I consider that so much of who we are is made up of how other people view us.

Smith and Nizza's (2021) recommend that researchers reflect on their emotions and feelings as they read the participant stories. In doing so, this helped me to explicitly map my role in the research process and make my own thoughts, opinions, and feelings an acknowledged part of the data analysis and interpretation. For example, I was particularly touched by one of the participant's descriptions of her life as a mother, and how she moves in and out of the role when at home and when at sea (see *Fig. 14*). I believe it was my initial emotional response to this description that made it something particularly significant. From then I was able to be aware of other times that other participants moved in and out of various life roles. I have included a few short extracts from my reflexive journal in the figures that follow (*Fig. 14, 15 and 16*).

Figure 14

Extract 2 from Reflective Diary – written after another interview with a South African female seafarer



16.12.2020

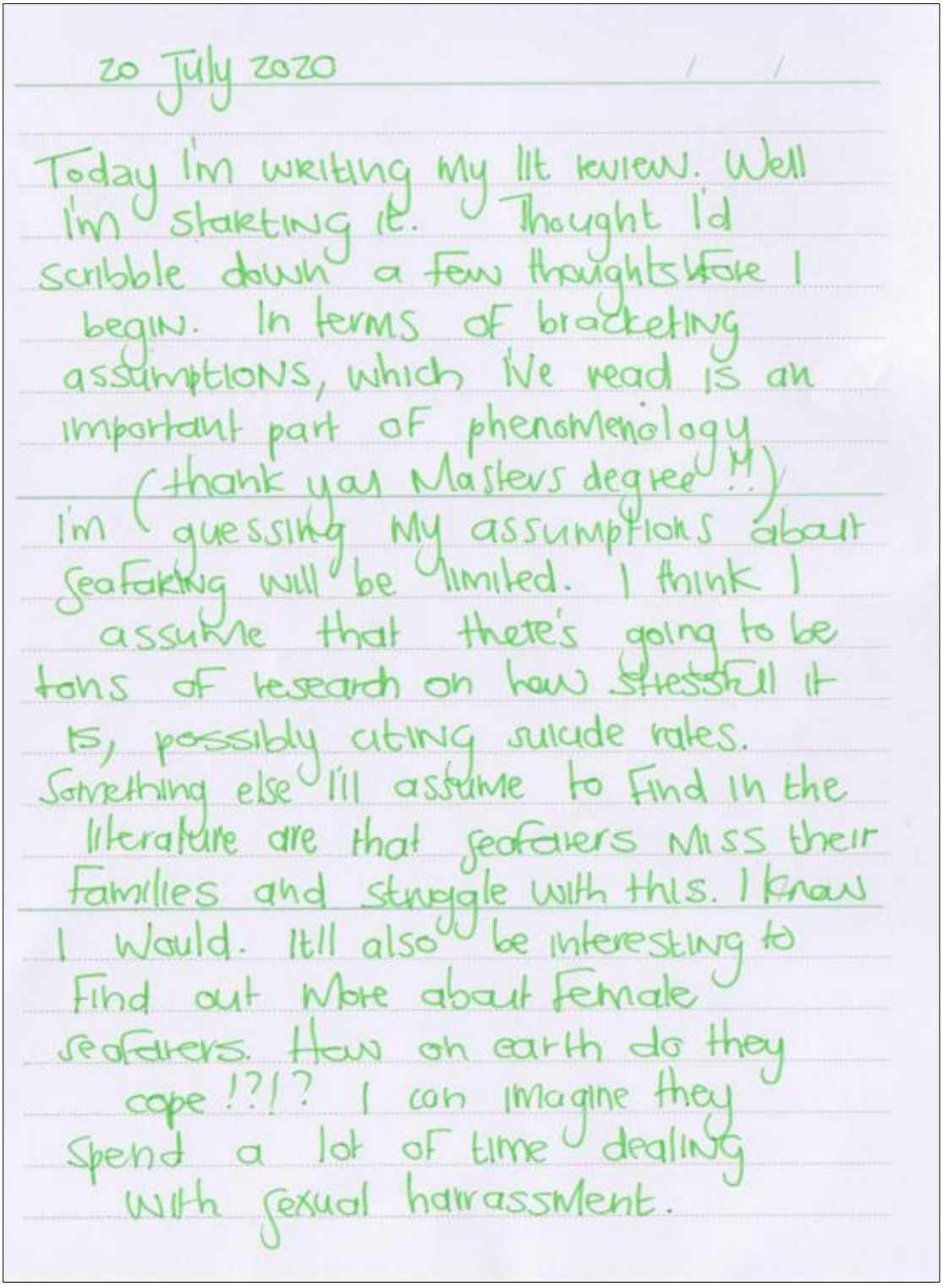
Interview with S. (First)

This was really enjoyable. I felt an instant rapport with a fellow South African woman. It was interesting to note immediately how grateful she was for the interview. Which was odd since she was doing me the favour. She kept thanking me and saying how happy she is that someone is finally looking into this. She struggled to express things - almost as if the magnitude of what she wanted to say couldn't be conveyed in words really. I was struck by how isolated she is; she seemed so lonely.

Figure 15

Extract 3 from Reflective Diary

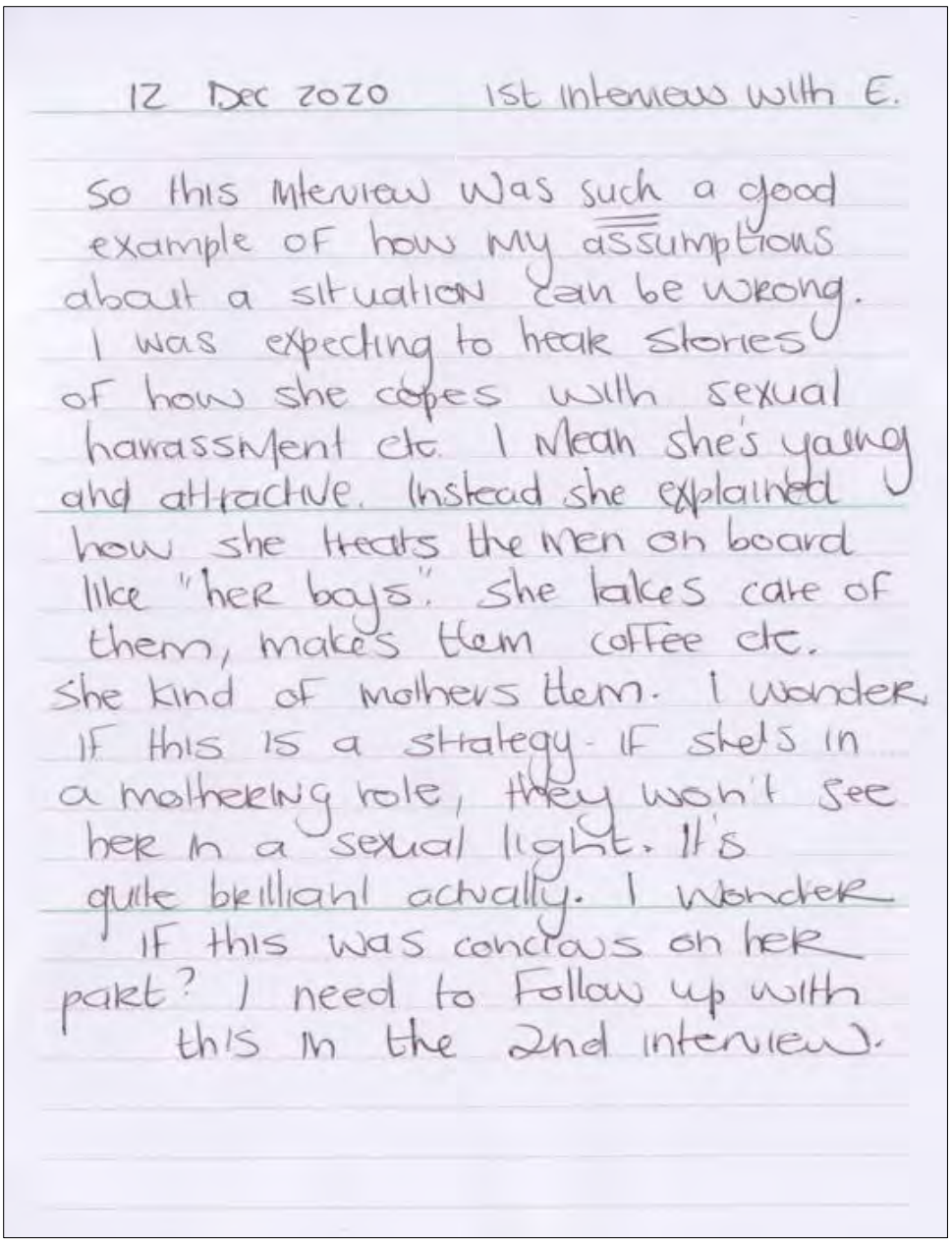
Written before starting on my literature review



F*igure 16*

Extract 4 from Reflective Diary

Written after an interview with a female seafarer



12 Dec 2020 1st interview with E.

So this interview was such a good example of how my assumptions about a situation can be wrong. I was expecting to hear stories of how she copes with sexual harassment etc. I mean she's young and attractive. Instead she explained how she treats the men on board like "her boys". She takes care of them, makes them coffee etc. She kind of mothers them. I wonder if this is a strategy - if she's in a mothering role, they won't see her in a sexual light. It's quite brilliant actually. I wonder if this was conscious on her part? I need to follow up with this in the 2nd interview.

6.4 Conclusion to chapter

This chapter has presented the research design which served as the structural framework of specific methods and techniques that arose from the assumptions underpinning IPA as described previous methodology chapter. Dividing the methodology and method chapters meant that the philosophical underpinnings of IPA were explicitly clarified before the steps taken to conduct my research were outlined. In this chapter, the latest guidelines from Smith

and Nizza (2021) were explained. These steps were strictly followed to gather, analyse and write up the data. Extracts from transcriptions and my reflexive journal have been used to illustrate key points and provide evidence of my following of these steps. The next chapter will go on to present the analysis the transcripts, using extracts from the transcriptions to justify interpretations made.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS

"Huzza! Huzza!" cried the seamen, as with swinging tarpaulins they began the act of nailing the gold to the mast.

Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 214)*

7.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter discusses the results of the interpretive phenomenological analysis, the steps of which were described in detail in the preceding chapter. Smith and Nizza (2021) recommend presenting the results in a narrative format that is both comprehensible and compelling, with a key factor being organised and systematic alternation between interpretation of the data and extracts from the transcriptions. They go on to note that this alternation ensures that the narrative is persuasive, since the interpretation is justified by the extracts (Smith & Nizza, 2021). This recommendation was followed in the layout of this chapter.

Table 2 shows the details of the 12 participants who partook in the interviews. To locate the qualitative findings, Seale (1999) advises that the reader is provided with a detailed, rich description of the context of each participant. This is also to provide the reader with adequate information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings that they know (p. 45). This was thus done by including this information in the final column of this table.

Analysis of the transcripts resulted in the identification of four Group Experiential Themes which relate to the lived experiences of seafarers as it pertains to living in two worlds, the occupational stressors they face, their well-being practices and mental health interventions and stigma in the industry. Each GET was further broken down into sub-themes, which have been identified using quotes from the participants themselves. This is shown in Table 3.

Table 2

Participants' details

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age	Title	Years working as a seafarer	Received mental health training?	Context
Participant A	Male	British	30 - 40 years	Officer	10 - 15 years	No	Currently working on a cargo ship as an officer. Was at home for two months at the time of the interview.
Participant B	Male	Indian	30 - 40 years	Other (Doctor)	5 - 10 years	Nothing work-based but formal medical studies included mental health.	Currently working on a cruise ship as a medical doctor. Had just returned home at the time of interview.
Participant C	Male	British	30 - 40 years	Officer	5 - 10 years	Unsure	Currently working as an officer on a cargo ship. Had just returned home for three months at the time of interview.
Participant D	Male	British	60 - 70 years	Officer	15 years +	Nothing work-based but formal qualification in mental health first aid pursued independently	Currently working as a captain at sea. Interview conducted from his cabin on a cargo ship.
Participant E	Male	South African	40 - 50 years	Engineer	10 - 15 years	Unsure	Currently working as an engineer on a cargo ship and on leave for a month. Interview conducted from his home.
Participant F	Male	South African	30 - 40 years	Officer	10 - 15 years	No	Currently working on a cargo ship. Had just returned home for three months at the time of interview.
Participant G	Female	British	30 - 40 years	Officer	10 - 15 years	Yes	Currently working as an officer on a cargo ship. Had just returned home after being stuck at sea for eight months and unable to return home because of COVID restrictions at port.

Table 2 continued

Participants' details

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age	Title	Years working as a seafarer	Received workplace mental health training?	Context
Participant H	Female	British	30 - 40 years	Officer	10 - 15 years	No	Currently working as an officer for two weeks "on" at sea, and then two weeks "off" at home on a cargo ship. Interview conducted while she was at home.
Participant I	Female	South African	40 - 50 years	Other (Nurse)	5 - 10 years	Nothing work-based but medical training included mental health	Currently working on a cruise ship as a nurse. Interview conducted from her cabin on the cruise ship. Has been stuck at sea for over six months owing to COVID restrictions at port.
Participant J	Male	Indian	50 - 60 years	Captain	15 years +	Yes	Currently working as a captain on a cargo ship. At home on shore leave while the interview was conducted.
Participant K	Male	British	20 - 30 years	Officer	5 - 10 years	No	Currently working as an officer for a cargo ship. At home at the time of the interview.
Participant L	Female	South African	30 - 40 years	Officer	10 - 15 years	No	Currently working as an officer on a cargo ship and at home on shore leave while the interview was conducted.

Table 3

Group experiential themes and sub-themes

Group Experiential Themes	Sub-themes
A: Lived experiences as a seafarer	A1: ‘’*You can’t go home at the end of the day’’*
	A2: ‘’*On the ship, that’s when the inner person comes out’’*
B: Lived experiences of occupational stressors	B1: *‘‘You just hope for good food’’*
	B2: *‘‘We are the unseen and the unknown’’*
	B3: *‘‘You’re living on call’*
	B4: *‘‘As soon as that date moves, it just throws you’’*
C: Lived experiences of well-being	C1: *‘‘Don’t let the little man in your heads live there for free’’*
	C2: *‘‘You learn to recognise certain triggers’’*
	C3: *‘‘So that is what I work for’’*
	C4: ‘’*You just got to accept certain things’’*
	C5: *‘‘We talk to each other quite often’’*
	C6: *‘‘Even if things aren’t good, you learn to make a joke of it’’*
D: Lived experiences of mental health and interventions	D1: *‘‘We can cope; we don’t need mental health’’*
	D2: *‘‘It gets lip service’’*

7.2 GET A: Lived experiences of life at sea and impact on identity

7.2.1 Introduction

This GET is concerned with the seafarer living in two worlds – the world on the ship and the world on shore. Of course, living across two worlds is not uncommon. Most of us live across at least two different worlds – normally the world at home and the world at work – and most of us adapt to these two separate worlds with relative ease. However, the participants' descriptions of these two worlds highlight two differences. These differences form two sub-themes related to this GET. First, while the seafarer is at sea, work and home become one and the same, yet they are also completely separated from each other when the seafarer is at home, for weeks or even months at a time. Second, this appears to have a complex impact on the identity of some of the participants.

7.2.2 Sub-theme A1: *You can't go home at the end of the day*

For the seafarer on board a ship, work is home and home is work. The seafarer is unable to leave their place of work at the end of the shift. Participant A notes the significant impact that this has on him:

> *Participant A: I think the biggest difference to a normal job is when you're working at sea, you can't go home at the end of the day. So, when you're working with people and you might have some issues with them, maybe some fallings out or you just simply don't like them. You don't have that escape.*
> *Researcher: Oh ok.*
> *Participant A: Yeah, when it comes to five o'clock, that you can't go home and decompress.*

Participant A's usage of the word "*escape*" in his first comment indicates the sense of being trapped – he is unable to be free of the ship environment for the duration he is on board. Participant A then goes on to use the word "*decompress*" when he describes this experience. To decompress evokes the idea of relief from pressure. For Participant A, there is no relief from the pressure he feels on the ship while he is at work – he can't go home and return to a normal, more relaxed state after a period of intense stress.

Likewise, Participant C refers to being unable to leave the ship as one of the biggest stressors he experiences at sea. He also describes this experience as one that is managed in only one possible way.

> *And that's what really creates the biggest stressors. At the end of the day, you can't get away from it. You can't just be like you know what I want to go home. Because the company will charge you if your contract is not finished. So, if it's if you want to go home, just because enough is enough. Unless it's a medical emergency they can sign you off. That's okay. But basically, unless it is a medical accident or something like that, I think that most of the time you just got to suck it up and wait it out until you are finished and just deal with it that way.*

Participant C describes here that if a seafarer feels enough is enough, an understandable feeling when faced with the inevitable stressors on board, there is no option for seafarers other than to ''*suck it up and wait it out*''. Interestingly, medical emergencies or accidents are treated with the necessary urgency; however, there does not seem to be any kind of management plan on board for the individual who feels overwhelmed with ship life, at least in this participant's view.

Participant B likens being on the ship to being on Big Brother, a reality show where strangers who live together in a house are filmed every moment of the day. Participants on this TV show are, similarly to seafarers, unable to escape the environment for weeks or even months at a time. There is the added complexity, however, of being watched. Participant B explains that on board, there is a constant sense of being watched and expected to perform, again reiterating the idea of being in a highly pressurised environment from which there is no escape:

> *From my experience, the first problem is, and I'm sure you've heard this Big Brother show. Where people go live in a house and always watched. If I was on land, I would go to work, have a stressful 12-hour shift, then go home and handover. But on the ship, you are kind of always at work even though you are not at work.*

Participant B goes on to describe how even simple things, such as waking up on a Saturday morning, are altered because of this Big Brother environment:

> *You can wake up on a Saturday morning as a man in my shorts and go water my garden. You know, but at work you always have to be dressed up and you have to be dressed up properly. So that's one. So, everybody's watching you, everybody who you know, everybody, all of us watching each other.*

Participant A, Participant C and Participant B appear aware of the two separate contexts that are amalgamated aboard – home and the workplace. For these three participants, there is a cognisance of the feelings that come with living and working in an enclosed environment for months at a time, such as the feeling of always being watched, or not able to escape the work environment.

In contrast to what these participants describe, some participants are able to assimilate on board to the extent that they feel quite comfortable. Participant D is able to do this, despite sailing with a new crew every time he joins a ship:

> *Whereas here, it's because you are living, eating, and the whole job is revolved around this single state of a ship, that we do blend in...so we adapt really quickly and you are literally becoming a sort of family because you're taking your meals with these people, your recreation or going to the gym, if you have one, and things like that.*

Participant D uses the phrase *blend in* to describe his experience of joining a ship. If someone blends into a particular group or situation, they seem to belong there. It seems that Participant D quickly experiences a sense of belonging on board. Furthermore, he notes that his crewmates become his family for the duration of the voyage. His usage of the word *family* indicates that, unlike Participant A, B and C, he is able to feel at home on board, which is also his place of work. Participant I is also able to feel at home on board, describing her experience as follows:

> *So, this was kind of a fantasy world because it's away from your world at home. And then usually what happens is this becomes part of you. Your world that's not really your real world (which is home) becomes your real world because you are more here on the ship than when you are at home.*

Participant I notes that the world on the ship becomes a part of who she is, to the extent that her life on board becomes her real world. Furthermore, she seems to be able to partition these two worlds so that when she is on the ship, she is emotionally detached from her life at home. Her life at home, while she is onboard, feels unreal, like a fantasy. It could be the case that this helps her to cope with the demands of moving between the two worlds. If home is a fantasy, perhaps the worries and problems that are associated with home become fantasies too.

Participant I's description of this experience is quite abstract, but Participant E's description brings more clarity as he describes this experience in more practical terms:

> *We get so used to our daily routines and the setups* [at sea]. *The moment you get out of that routine and habits and getting exposed to something else, and that becomes a habit and a routine, your previous habits and routine is like – yoh, what is it again?*

Participant E explains here how he assimilates into his environment on board to the extent that he almost forgets the habits and routines of home ashore, and as noted by Participant I, the ship becomes what he lives at the end of the day. Potentially because he becomes so accustomed to life at sea, Participant E goes on to use the word ''*surreal''* to describe the experience of being back on shore after almost nine months at sea, echoing Participant I's description of home becoming a fantasy:

> *So, and my girlfriend, one of her friends stayed in Durban. So, she said, don't you want to go meet at a coffee shop, and it's like, okay, not a problem. So I went from my hotel, I was staying, and I took an Uber to the place. And just even in an Uber cab in the Uber drive, it was just so surreal, of just driving in a car again, after eight and a half months on the ship, not setting a foot on land. And now I'm in a car, and like, yo, we driving in cars, okay, now I remember this. And just chatting with the Uber guy was, was so nice as well. So when I got to the coffee shop, I just sat there. And it was just so, it's so I don't know, it's very difficult to put it in words.*

Participant E finds the experience of returning to life on shore so strange that he struggles to find the words to describe it. Even driving in a car, something that many of us are accustomed to doing, is noted as being something that he has to remember from before he left. It is not a

natural transition for him to get back into a car, but he experiences it as a noteworthy event. Participant F compares this ‘‘*surreal*’ experience to being in a movie, again reiterating the sense of fantasy and peculiarity:

> *When I signed up in Durban, one of my colleagues at work with me, we friends for many years, we studied together cadetship together, and his flight was on the day that we signed off I was still in the hotel, and he sent me a voicemail saying, “Man, it feels like I’m living in a movie.” Yeah, and it really is*.

For Participant F, this experience seems to involve feelings of being alienated from or unfamiliar with his surroundings, possibly as if he is watching his life from outside his body. Participant G also describes how overwhelming he found this surreal experience of returning home to shore, noting that it takes a time of adjustment:

> *So always, the first week when I get back to the stimulation in the community. It’s overwhelming. It’s something I need to get used to… that’s like almost that’s very intense. Just to adapt again into the community*.

He includes the words ‘‘*intense”* and ‘‘*stimulation”* in his description here, words that make the experience sound quite overwhelming. On the other hand, Participant I describes returning home and sharing her stories of life at sea as overwhelming for those she had left behind.

> *You have no idea – when I go home. I would normally tell everybody about my experience and people would laugh. People would be so overwhelmed with what I tell them. And because this is what’s happening on the ships. It’s a very interesting world*.

Participant I’s description implies that firstly, she feels misunderstood by people on shore. They do not understand her experience on board to the extent that they either laugh or feel completely overwhelmed by it. Secondly, and as already noted, her analogy of the ship being a “*very interesting world*” implies that when she leaves the ship, Participant I does not just leave her place of work. She leaves a ‘‘*world”* behind that is very different and separate to the world on shore. It is one to which people on shore cannot relate, and do not understand, to the extent that stories of life at sea are overwhelming for those on shore. Equally overwhelming, however, is the experience of re-entering life on shore for those who have been

at sea. This perhaps is what contributes to Participant I's experience of her real life onboard becoming a fantasy once she returns home. Participant F uses an interesting word to describe his process of returning to life on shore:

> *It's overwhelming that I would say, if you go straight into a I normally come back, I spend a day or two with a family just acclimatising and getting back into the swing of things. But if I come back out at once, and I went straight out to a party sort of thing just was too many people. I'll just like who do I talk to what do I know? So yeah, it's, I would say, sometimes overwhelming. But everyone has their own way of dealing with things.*

Participant F uses the word acclimatise to explain his process of settling back in. To acclimate means to respond either physiologically or behaviourally to a different environment. It entails a period of adaptation and adjustment. This implies that there is a process that Participant F must undergo to fit back into his new environment that is significantly different from his previous environment.

This surreal and intense experience of returning home to a new environment after living and working in a separate world for an extended period could be why Participant D comments on the fact that people who have spent time in prison are offered some form of reintroduction to civilian life. Prisoners are afforded support and monitoring as they undergo the stressful experience of re-entering society. Participant D notes that seafarers are expected to step back into life on shore without this form of support:

> *But if you consider where people get institutionalised, or you know, you're in prison, your usual routine is that and then they let you out of prison, you know, let's go through halfway houses and they come out and then they're monitored. And they have a reintroduction into civilian society type courses and mariners don't have anything like that*.

This participant makes a useful suggestion – perhaps seafarers do need help when re-entering civilian life on shore. More importantly to our understanding of seafarer experiences, however, this comment from Participant D shows the considerable strain that some seafarers face when returning home to shore. This is an experience that is compared to being released from prison, something that is highly stressful, disorientating, and involves a significant amount of adjustment and adaptation.

It is significant to note, as a conclusion to this section, that even seafarers who have reportedly high levels of PWB, take strain moving between their lives at sea and their lives on shore. It is described as one of the ‘‘*biggest stressors*’’ with participants using words like ‘‘*decompress”, “escape”, “intense”* and *“overwhelming”* in their descriptions of their experiences. Furthermore, this experience includes a sense of derealisation when adjusting to life on shore, with many of the participants using words/phrases such as *“surreal”, “fantasy”* and *“living in a movie”*. This is not a typical work stressor that is faced in a typical work environment. The possible impact of this stressor cannot be ignored. It has not, to my knowledge, been the focus of previous research on seafarer mental health and well-being, yet it could pose a considerable threat to some seafarers.

7.2.3 Sub-theme A2: *On the ship, that is when the inner person comes out*

Despite the participants’ varying accounts of living and working on board, it seems that most of them experience an impact on their sense of self because of working at sea. This appears to be managed in various ways. Some participants describe how they hide their true selves on board, as in Participant A’s case. It is common to put on one’s best behaviour at work; however, Participant A finds himself doing this all the time since he lives in proximity with his colleagues. This results in him living inauthentically, although his intention for doing so is to avoid unnecessary conflict:

> *Participant A: And so there was one ship where the chief engineer was just really not a nice person. Always very, very quick to blow up at people. Very patronising. And I call small, angry man syndrome. He wasn’t very tall. And he was it was like a little Rottweiler. He was always biting at people. And that made the whole atmosphere on board really unpleasant because if people are working with them for 12, 13, 14 hours a day. And you’re in such close proximity, and you don’t have like, you can’t get off the boat to de-stress, then, that makes it difficult. And I think there can be a lot of anxiety because people, you are kind of forced to be a little bit two faced sometimes, because you can really dislike someone strongly. But you have to try and be all smiles and nicey-nicey.*
> *Researcher: Yeah. Do you mean like just to make it bearable to live with this person?*
> *Participant A: Yeah, and I think for the, for the crew, as well.*

Participant A's use of the word ''*forced*'' (in that he is ''*forced to be a little bit two faced sometimes''*) denotes a sense of behaving in a manner that goes against what he would ideally like. He has to behave inauthentically against his will to manage the anxiety-provoking situation in which he finds himself. The psychological toll that is placed upon Participant A, firstly in suppressing his true feelings and secondly, in consistently having to monitor himself, his behaviour and his reactions to things must be extremely difficult. He himself notes that this can cause a lot of anxiety. This is perhaps why Participant B, who describes a similar experience in this regard to Participant A, explains how weary he becomes:

> S*o at some point in time, you get tired of smiling, you know, once you leave your cabin, you have to smile, you don't know who you are bumping – at some point in time, you know, it gets to you. Not really being able to express yourself to other crew members, and, you know, yourself.*

Interestingly, Participant B's authenticity and ability to be real, even with himself, is impacted by having to put on an act while at sea.

In contrast, some participants note how free they are on board to be their true selves. For some seafarers, being at sea appears to be an extremely positive experience in this regard. Participant I describes her experience on board a cruise ship with a transgender crewmate.

> *There's a lot of guys on the ship, which when home they don't feel free to have… to let out their choices. But on the ship, when they, on the ship, that is when the inner person comes out. Like, example, we currently have a lady on the ship. She's a saxophone player, she's 70 years of age. She has… she's transgender. But she has had a sex change so she has had a lot of discrimination against her at home because it also depends on your culture, some people would just not accept this.*

Participant I implies that this crewmate is able to live as a transgender woman on board, allowing her ''*inner person*'' to come out. This results in a rather ironic situation – this woman is able to live freely as her chosen gender while at sea. However, when she returns home, which is normally a space where people feel they can be themselves, she faces discrimination regarding her chosen gender.

Participant G enjoyed feeling herself again when she returned to work as chief mate after extended maternity leave. In the extract that follows, she notes that when she is on board, she is seen just as Participant G, and not as *Sarah's*[1] *Mum*.

> *It* [returning to work after maternity leave] *allowed me to be. I wasn't talking about dirty nappies, or sleep routine, or anything like that. And as much as the guys, you know, we're like, oh, how is it? You know, how was motherhood? It wasn't the main topic of conversation… I was* Hannah[2]*, I wasn't Sarah's Mum. I was in fact, if anything, I was* Hannah Taylor[3] *rather than my married name. Okay, it kind of took me all the way back being my own person again.*

Stepping out of her role as Sarah's Mum while at sea afforded her the opportunity to feel like her true self again, without the role identity she receives from being a mother and a wife. In the same light, Participant F notes that at sea he is able to escape the expectations related to his role as son and boyfriend, which became especially difficult for him to manage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> *My girlfriend and her family aren't very strict when it comes to Corona regulations. They would go braai*[4] *with the next-door neighbour sort of thing. Whereas my family's always been one that followed rules. And the rule is made, you follow it – sort of story. And I got stuck between the girlfriend trying to pull me one way and the family trying to pull me the other way and it became detrimental to myself and who I am. And then they called me for the ship. And I was like okay, well let me go.*

Participant F explains how this tension created by two parties with different expectations of him was detrimental to who he is, implying that his sense of self was conflicted because of the situation. He goes on to explain that at sea this is naturally resolved, and he felt liberated to be himself again:

> *It allows me to be me if I can put it that way. When I'm at sea, when I'm at home, I've got different responsibilities, and going back out*

[1] Pseudonym
[2] Pseudonym
[3] Pseudonym
[4] South African term for barbecue

there, it's like the weight has just dropped off my shoulders. It is sort of like I was locked up in a way and just being on the ship just unlocked me and then go be yourself again.

Both participants use words to describe their experiences that are significant. Participant G notes that she could go "*all the way back*" to being her own person, while Participant F notes that he was "*unlocked*" to be himself again and that in this process, the "*weight just dropped off* [his] *shoulders*". Participant G and Participant F's comments imply a sense of relief at being removed from a situation on shore where they are required to play various roles as boyfriend, son and mother. While at sea, both participants feel a sense of identity in a manner that appears to be healthy and positive. This is also seen in how Participant J also describes his latest experience at returning to sea:

All the nonsense people talk about on social media. There is so much hate. So much violence. Once you get away from it all on a ship and you are away from the Internet, your friends are busy and whatever. You are just by yourself. You collect your thoughts. You understand.

From these comments, a logical conclusion could be that, while being at sea might have its share of interpersonal stressors, it could be a welcome escape from family expectations and societal roles. However, it seems that this issue is far more complex. Participant F, who initially explains how free he feels to be himself at sea, describes his return home as follows:

Friends of mine, they stay at home for an entire week. And they just isolate and just like let me be me. I just want to sleep and rest and get back into being me again. Other guys come home and the first night they are partying. Yeah, it depends on the person, I suppose.

Participant F initially described how he is *''unlocked''* at sea and thus able to be himself, but when he returns to shore, he goes through a process of settling back into himself. At first glance, this does not make sense. However, his illustration of the vocabulary he uses at home and at sea could offer further clarity on what seems to be a paradox. Participant F notes that at sea, he swears like a sailor:

Researcher: So it sounds like you come home and need some time to get back into being you again as you say.
Participant F: Yeah even the person you are, at sea, you can

> *swear like a sailor. You can, as they say, you end up swearing like a sailor. I think it's just, it's a vocabulary. And words just fly and stuff like that. Yeah. You get on the plane, you come home, and you don't utter a word. You know, that doesn't even get uttered. It's sort of a lost vocabulary at home.*

Participant F's usage of the idiom *"swear like a sailor"* implies that swearing on board is quite natural for him and seems to be an accepted part of his identity – he is, of course, a sailor and thus he swears like one. He goes on to explain here that his vocabulary changes the moment he gets onto a plane to return home to shore. The way he explains it is worth noting. First, the change that occurs when he gets on the plane seems instant and automatic – not a swear word is even *uttered* after he leaves the ship. Second, his use of the passive voice is revealing. He is not saying, ''*I do not utter a swear word*''. Instead, the use of passive voice removes him completely from the sentence. In other words, Participant F has gone from swearing like a sailor at sea to swearing not even featuring in a sentence when at home. This shows how these two contexts powerfully shape his behaviour and the way in which he expresses himself. Third, he speaks about this vocabulary becoming a *''lost''* vocabulary, implying that it disappears or goes missing unintentionally without much effort on Participant F's part. It seems to be a natural process, similar to the process of settling back into himself. It could be argued that the decision to swear or not swear is rooted in an individual's value system, and that surely this value system would remain the same despite the context. In this case, however, the context is far more powerful. It may be that these two contexts Are so completely separated from each other that the one does not dilute the other to the extent it does for those of us who alternate each day between work and home. For Participant F, it seems as if there is a ship self and a shore self, and both are authentic and natural.

The same can be seen in what Participant G describes. As already mentioned, Participant G feels free to be herself at sea, and mentions specifically how she enjoys slipping out of her role as ''*Sarah's Mum''.* However, she also explains how much she misses out on when she is at sea. Ironically, most of the things she describes missing out on are directly connected to her role as ''*Sarah's Mum'':*

> *Ah, wow, this is multi-faceted, I would say, I mean, obviously, you've got the fact that you're away from home, you're missing out on weddings, christenings, birthdays, nights out, you know, missing watching your children grow up. And, you know, so that can be hard. And especially like, if your relationship with your partner or even family*

members are draining a little bit and suddenly go away, it doesn't help. So that definitely has stress.

She goes on to explain that this is such a difficult experience for her that at times she questions her decision to be at sea. In the extract that follows, Participant G again refers to her first trip at sea after her maternity leave. She also refers to herself in the third person, as she did when calling herself ''*Sarah's Mum''*. However, now she uses the term ''*Mummy'':*

It was heart-breaking because actually I spent most of the time crying. Basically, every time I phoned home and Facetimed home, she [her daughter] just she didn't understand that she could hear Mummy and she could see Mummy but she couldn't cuddle or she just didn't understand. She didn't. She didn't understand. Yeah, it was hard. It's bloody hard. And so it made me question what the hell am I doing? Why am I doing this?

It would have been more grammatically appropriate to refer to herself in the first person in this extract – *me*. Referring to herself in the third person as *Mummy,* which is clearly the term her child uses for her, emphasises who she is in the eyes of her child, and this remains constant whether she is physically with her child at home or not. At sea (where she is both at work and at home) Participant G enjoys being able to slip out of her role as ''*Sarah's Mum''* and then feels more like herself. However, at the same time she remains ''*Mummy''* and this seems like an important component of Participant G's identity. Again, the complexity related to identity, evident also in Participant F's descriptions, is present. In addition to this, these extracts emphasise that while there may be some relief in being able to relinquish certain roles for a prescribed period, this comes at a cost, which involves missing out.

Perhaps this is why Participant D has a different ''*drawer*'' for each life that he lives, opening and shutting each drawer when needed:

So there's a drawer and you can put those things in that drawer and you can shut that drawer up in that cupboard. And then you go on to the next mission, the next thing, or you come back again, or we go to sea, or you go to family, and for each context that I'm in, I work with that life that I'm in at the time.

Participant D goes on to note that he deliberately keeps these two worlds very separate, sounding quite protective in the sharing of only minimal information with his wife about life at sea:

> *My wife obviously asked me what I do at work and I tell her some things, sum up some of the minimal things. Some of the places I've worked in are not very secure of piracy issues or malaria or issues or Ebola, or where I've been before. I tell her the truth. And she does understand to some degree, sometimes the insecure places that I'm working in, and some troubles I do.*

Similarly to Participant D who has two drawers for the two worlds in which he lives, Participant A explains how he manages the two worlds by *switching* between these two worlds, almost as if he undergoes an automatic change or transformation when he moves from one world to the other:

> *I think it's always harder for the people that you leave behind. For me, because I've always done it, I think when you go away, you just switch to being on board and when you come home, you switch to being at home, but for my wife it's a lot harder because it's like two different routines and it's hard to change from one to the other.*

Participant A explains that his homecoming is far more difficult for his wife than it is for him. The reason he cites for this is that his homecoming creates a new routine for his wife, and he acknowledges that it is difficult for her to change from one routine when he is not there to another when he is home. It would be interesting to explore his wife's experience to find out if she too undergoes this switching of identity when Participant A returns home. Regardless, Participant A's description of it being a lot harder for his wife shows that, from his perspective at least, this switching does not happen, and that his wife needs to adjust to his return. Could this be because in his mind his wife's identity remains fixed? In other words, when Participant A is away is at sea or when he is at home, his wife remains the same person in his mind. While his wife may herself feel switching in identity on her husband's return home, it does not seem to be obvious to Participant A.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, it is noted that eight of the participants in this study mentioned experiences related to identity and sense of self. Some participants feel freer at sea to be themselves, away from the identity they acquire from certain roles they play at home. Others

seem to have two identities with different behaviours, different language use, and possibly even different values. The potential impact of identity on the family member of one of the participants was also touched upon.

7.2.4 Conclusion

The lived experience of seafarers is a lived experience across two different worlds. These two worlds are very much separate from each other to the extent that some of the seafarers behave and speak very differently while at sea from when they are at home. These worlds are so separate that some seafarers feel as if life at home is a fantasy while they're at sea and re-entering this fantasy can be a disorientating process that feels surreal.

For some seafarers, this experience of living across two worlds impacts on their sense of self. Some participants describe a sense of freedom to be themselves at sea, away from the various roles they fulfil at home. However, some of the same participants describe welcoming the thought of returning home to live authentically again, with the roles they play (mother, son, boyfriend) forming significant components of their identities. This is a new finding and one that has not, to my knowledge, been the subject of research on the matter.

7.3 GET B: Lived experiences of occupational stressors

7.3.1 Introduction

The participants described experiences of several stressors that, in combination, could be considered unique to the maritime industry. Many of these, such as social isolation and time away from family, for example, have been identified and discussed in previous research, and described in the literature review. What follows in this section are four occupational stressors that have not, to the best of my knowledge, been identified in any previous research on seafarer mental health. These four stressors are unique in one of two ways – either the stressor is something that is rarely experienced in other industries, or the stressor is experienced by some seafarers to a degree that seems more significant than it is experienced in other industries.

7.3.2 Sub-theme B1: *You just hope for good food*

Food plays a major role on board a ship. It seems that good food can do wonders for seafarer morale and stress levels. Participant E is so affected by poor quality food on board that it has a negative impact on his morale:

And whenever it's a good cook, and the food is good, it boosts the morale so much. Yes, when the cook doesn't make effort, and it's just a piece of fish and dry rice, and horrible, you still eat it because you're hungry. But it just drops your morale so much.

Participant E also notes that a poorly cooked meal indicates to him that the cook has not made an effort. He seems to take it personally. Like Participant E, Participant K notes that poor quality food impacts his mood, and he also goes on to say that it affects most people at sea:

You either get good food and bad food, and bad food you generally know cause everyone's just not happy. It's what I would say is like most, most people will be like, it's a bit rubbish. You just feel a bit down.

Participant K then goes on to describe a harrowing experience of sailing through terrible weather off the coast of the Shetlands in the North Sea, and what he reports ultimately helped mitigate crew stress levels, is noteworthy:

So we were like, probably about 24 or 36 hours going maybe. And then it was like we just thought we wanted good food at that point. And the chef, I don't even know what he cooked. It was just something that you remember him cooking, something good. And everyone was a bit happier after that.

Participant K does not remember exactly what food was served after this stressful incident on board. He remembers only how it made him feel, and the positive impact that it had on the mood of the rest of the crew, again reiterating that powerful impact that food has on the mood of a seafarer. Participant D also notes that there is not much else on board that has the power to lift crew spirits like food can:

Participant D: Because you don't have much else to change crew morale, your work is pretty constant anyway. Where like a good meal or good quality food definitely generally brings the crew morale up. Researcher: Okay. That is so interesting, really, that something so simple could like have such an impact on, on crew morale. Participant D: I think it's definitely much more felt at sea where you can't get any other like, home comforts really? I think whereas like at home, you've got other things, you can boost your morale where at

sea you're, you just can't go and do any of the other stuff. So it's, you just hope for good food.

Participant D experiences good food on board as a ''*home comfort*'' which is a term generally used to describe something that contributes to physical ease and emotional well-being. He also notes how food gives him something for which to hope.

There appears to be several reasons that poor quality food can play such a significant role in the mood and morale of some seafarers. One of the reasons could be that poor quality food seems to exacerbate the feeling of being trapped on board. This is suggested in Participant D's comment, where he describes there being not much else that can be done at sea to lift one's mood. Participant C clarifies this further:

Participant C: And it's day in day out of struggling and you don't have the support system there to help you with the work that you're supposed to be doing. No, you can't get away. That's it, you can't really complain either, because it's depending on how good the chief is, or that actually is proactive, that they want to work but they also don't and no one wants to cause any trouble, you want to keep it as peaceful a' possible. And I was actually thinking, one more point that I didn't say, which I think will sound really weird, but it is just bad food on board.
Researcher: Others I have spoken to have mentioned that, actually.
Participant C: It really does affect you the same as I were saying you can't get away from it. That's the food that you have to eat.

Interestingly here, Participant C brings up the subject of food directly after discussing how one is unable to get away from other stressors on board, as he seems to have associated the feeling of being trapped on board with the issue of food. Participant C goes on to describe how, during his last trip, the crew was unable to get the cook on board replaced, and this meant that they had to resign themselves to poorly prepared food for the entire voyage:

And I guess I don't know, as I've gotten older and sailed more, I also become a little bit more picky in the fact of not accepting – no man like this is not me not being hungry. This is just not a good job. And that's quite a bit demoralising. And with the last trip we had it and there was nothing we can do. We can't sign off the guy, because no one can get signed off. So then you try your best and it just becomes quite crap.

> *So the chief engineers well, basically walk in for dinner, look at the plates and be like, no, the choices and then make himself a sandwich and that's after working the whole day and eating a sandwich. So that's one of the big stressors as well that actually affects the whole crew.*

Participant C also implies here the entire crew felt quite helpless in the face of the issue – there was nothing they could do about it. The engineer had to settle with a sandwich, after (as noted by Participant C) working all day. The only response available to the crew was to accept the situation and live with it, something that potentially caused frustration and annoyance in an already highly pressurised environment.

Another reason poor quality food could have such a negative impact is that food is one of the only things to look forward to on board, as Participant E goes on to note:

> *They had this really, really amazing chef from South Africa actually. And he would come down and be like, Alright, guys, what do you fancy, like for the next few days, or maybe do some sushi, do some steak like, you want some veggie stuff? And it makes a really big difference when you actually look forward to your food.*

Participant E echoes what Participant A says in his description of how disappointing poor quality food can be after a long shift:

> *But I think one of the other really big things behind mental health is the quality of food on board. Yeah, I've been on boats where the food is awful. It really gets to you because you are working what, 12 hour shifts working, doing really hard physical work, and then you go to get your food and it's just not nice.*

It is worth noting here that Participant A directly connects poor quality food to mental health on board, which is understandable if, after a 12-hour shift of manual labour, the one thing you are looking forward to turns out to be a disappointment. Participant C feels the same as Participant A when it comes to disappointing food, calling it a let-down:

> *And it also just upsets you because you know what it's supposed to taste like you know how nice it is. And you saw this at lunchtime. Oh they are cooking this salmon for dinner. This is going to be nice, you*

> *kind of putting small little milestones in the day, like I'll just get to dinner, and I'll have a nice dinner. Nah, that's not gonna happen. Yeah, it's a it's a let-down of that.*

From what these seafarers are saying, it seems that food could act as a reward that helps them to deal with work and life on board. It gives some seafarers something positive to anticipate, and it is a source of variety in an otherwise monotonous environment. In addition, the sense of comfort that food can bring, especially after a long, hard day, is illustrated in these comments.

Food also serves to mark time on board. Participant F explains:

> *And often you lose complete track of time. If someone at home is saying, "I'm going to the movies" and you're saying, "Why aren't you at work?" Sort of story. So we count our days by food. And for most of the rest of the nationalities it is steak night. The Saturday night is normally steak, egg, and chips. So you count your weeks and your contracts generally counted as like, say six weeks? Yeah, cool. I've got 6 steak days, and then you count as you go, unless you're writing in the logbooks.*

Participant F's comment highlights how foreign the world on shore can become to the seafarer – time is experienced differently. It seems that food can be useful in maintaining a sense of normality on board in that regard. Participant C also notes that food helps with time management – he uses meals to break down lock shifts into manageable chunks:

> *But basically you break your day down one day at a time, which sounds like Alcoholics Anonymous, but it is basically one day at a time. So you can break your day down into small sections with meals and you deal with each section by itself.*

Poor quality food can also cause friction and conflict on board. In fact, crew meetings, strong opinions, complaints, and fights seem to be synonymous with bad food: Participant C explains how much effort and energy is put into the issue:

> *So that's one of the big stressors as well that actually affects the whole crew and everyone gets quite riled up about it. We had meetings about*

it, everyone gets passionate about it and a lot of input and then nothing happens. So it just demoralises a lot of guys because they realise if they do complain about something, nothing happens.

There is hope that the food will improve, and thus meetings are held, and input offered. Nothing happens, however, and this results in the crew feeling even more demoralised. The reason for this is that it puts the crew into the situation where they make input about their working conditions, but nothing changes. Thus, poor quality food has a ripple effect, starting with emotion-charged staff meetings and concluding with the crew feeling unacknowledged, unheard and possibly unappreciated. It is no wonder, then, that the participants describe reactions to poor-quality food that seem quite extreme from an outsider's perspective. Participant B describes how disgruntled the crew became because they had not had a barbecue for a while. It seems that the complaints got to the degree that Participant B had to intervene on behalf of the crew.

I have a captain and I went to him one day and I said I had just joined, I told the captain that "Captain, the crew are complaining that there has been no barbeque for the last three months".

Participant J shares an incident that involved more than just complaints from a disgruntled crew:

It all started with the cook. Because the cook was the captain's relative. This fellow is not a trained cook, so he came with the cookery book, came on board, so people are fed up, they got angry…

The crew became so angry with the poor-quality food the cook was making that they started threatening the captain. The captain ended up locking himself in his cabin, fearing for his life:

He went into his cabin, there was four days he was inside the cabin locked up. The ship was like as if there was a death that occurred on the ship. Nobody talking to each other….So the second officer was a young guy. This guy had covered the watch from the bridge. When he's on duty. He will dial the captain and he will cover the answering piece of a phone with a handkerchief he will change his tone and they will tell the captain, "Open your door I'm going to kill you." There was

> *a mutiny on the ship. And the engineers hit the captain. And the captain jumped overboard. Overnight. This was the Indian Ocean.*

Thankfully, this captain survived this ordeal, which Participant J identifies, quite aptly, as a mutiny. The captain's response here indicates the significant danger he was facing on board and the degree to which he feared for his life. This fear was so great that he believed that jumping into the ocean at night was a safer choice than remaining on board. Perhaps there were other issues frustrating the crew that resulted in this act of rebellion against authority, and not only poor-quality food. However, as Participant J notes, food was the catalyst for this situation. This is, of course, an extreme example, but it suggests that poor quality food has the potential to incite life-threatening violence on board in a confined workspace that is out of reach of law enforcement for weeks or months at a time.

Food also emphasises the cultural differences between crewmates on board and could serve as a catalyst for cultural conflict. Participant F, a South African seafarer, explains his experience with an Indian cook:

> *And with Indian ratings, they'll cook a lot more Indian food and it's a lot of curries. And then it'll be a curry for breakfast, go for lunch – curry, for dinner, breakfast, kind of like, it's all day long. So you can't really like eat that for Westerners, that amount of curry. Our system is just not capable.*

In direct contrast, Participant B, an Indian seafarer, shares his experience with a South African cook:

> *We had a South African cook as well. And all he made was boiled vegetables and potatoes and stuff like that and as an Indian you like flavour. You know, we like curry, vegetables and things. You want flavour. So for the entire duration, all I had was rice and whatever soup was made. So there was rice and soup. Four months. I was ok with it, but it does affect some people.*

While Participant B notes that this did not bother him, it did affect others on board. Participant F explains how his body was physically incapable of managing the food that was being served, apart from the fact that it was not enjoyable for him. If poor quality food can be the catalyst for mutiny on board, and it highlights cultural differences to this extent, it could become a

significant threat to healthy dynamics between crewmates and life on board in general. Cultural food preferences must also be catered for by the ship cook, which must be extremely challenging when accommodating a multi-cultural crew.

Eight of the 12 participants spoke directly about food on board playing a role in mood and general atmosphere. Badly cooked food can be very demoralising for the seafarer and cause great personal distress. It can exacerbate the feeling of being trapped, and can cause disappointment after anticipation of a reward, often one of the only rewards on board available to the seafarer. It can also cause fights and pose a threat to crew dynamics.

7.3.3 Sub-theme B2: *We are the unseen and the unknown*

The maritime industry is responsible for over 90% of global trade (Vij & Goyal, 2018). Those in the industry are, of course, aware of this fact. They also know how much the general public relies on the industry for the steady supply of almost anything from fruit and other fresh produce to cars, oil, steel, clothes and furniture. At the same time, seafaring takes tremendous sacrifice, at a level that is far greater than most land-based careers. The irony is that even though tremendous sacrifice is made by seafarers who work in an industry that is primarily responsible for global trade, very few members of the general public are aware of the critical role that seafarers play, as noted by Participant D:

> *Because we are the unseen and the unknown, because everyone sees shops full of all the retail that they can go and buy, let alone food, whereas in fact, I would say 99% of the general public don't appreciate that it's the seafarers that actually make that happen*.

Participant K also believes that seafarers are unseen and unheard, offering the following description:

> *So ya know, definitely there is a need to, like, just in my experience with being at sea. Nobody really cares. You're just a working tool, do the contract. You go, do the jobs and finish. You want to work again? Yeah. Okay, there you go. All right. Finish. You want to work? Yeah. Okay, there you go. And it just carries on like that.*

Participant E identifies seafarers as mere working tools. In other words, seafarers are objects, there to work, like a set of tools. Acknowledgement that has been received by some of the participants seems to have had a meaningful impact. For example, Participant F notes that his

company offered small treats on board during lockdown, and that this helped him to feel looked after and considered:

> *So just having you know, it sounds ridiculous for a person at sea – ashore, but just having a you know, an extra ice cream or a packet of chips or something like that – it's just so small, but if you take [company name] has 500 ships plus and $500 for each ship is a huge outlay in costs. For them to do it I was I was astounded that they did. But it was a great acknowledgement.*

Participant J feels acknowledged because the company for which he works offers sessions with a counsellor if needed:

> *I don't really use it so I don't know how effective it was, but they did make an issue about it, that you feel like talking to a counsellor, or somebody, here's a number and give this person a call. That I think was a good gesture on the company's part*.

Interestingly, it's not the counselling service itself that is significant to Participant J – in fact he notes it's not something that he would ever use. Instead, it is the fact that the company offers to arrange such a service in the first place. He refers to this as a gesture – a synonym for acknowledgement or appreciation.

The feeling of being unappreciated has also been exacerbated by COVID-19. Participant D explains how difficult it is for seafarers to hear about people still who are able to travel around the world for sporting events, for example, yet seafarers are unable to get home to see their families:

> *That all brings a strain on the mental health and well-being because a lot of these seafarers, when they do get news, hear about the sporting events that are going on, whether it's the Grand Prix or football, some of the most popular ones, if you like, which is showing the equipment, people and things travelling around the world making these events happening. Yet the seafarer can't get home*.

He goes on to note:

> *They fly all this PPE. And all these World Health Organisation and immunologists and vaccines all around the world, why can't they fly seafarers all around?*

This is perhaps why some of the participants mention the critical role that COVID has played in highlighting how much the world relies on seafarers. Participant H comments on this:

> *It sounds odd to say thanks to COVID. But that is pretty much the only good thing that's come out of it and the awareness of how much we rely on the seafarers.*

Participant J observes the same, using the word "*finally*" when he explains that seafarers are now more acknowledged because of COVID-19. His usage of this word creates the sense that, in his mind, discussion and awareness about seafarers, and an awareness of the sacrifices they make, has been lacking for a long time:

> *And with the Corona virus the amount of exposure the seafarers got; I think that is a good cause. You know seafarers are finally being talked about. They are people that are not home but they aren't anywhere else either, they are on a ship*.

Participant L feels the same:

> *Nobody ever discusses it and hasn't done until recently, of course, COVID-19 is probably one of the only benefits that's brought to our global and social awareness about mental health problems. That there are ways and means of overcoming that.*

In sum, these seven participants describe an interesting phenomenon. Seafarers are, in many regards, essential workers. Without them, global trade would be impossible. Yet they make huge personal sacrifices to do the work they do. Missing friends and family has certainly been the topic of research on seafarer mental health, but this section describes a closely related stressor that has not appeared in research on the issue. While many professions can be considered thankless, seafarers move through the world ‘‘*unseen and unheard''*, playing a

significant role in global trade. This could be considered an occupational stressor that has not yet been identified in any of the previous literature.

7.3.4 Sub-theme B3: *You're living on call*

The seafarer's role at sea is extremely intense. There are several reasons for this, most of these reasons impacting all levels of seafaring, from ratings and cadets to captains and chief engineers. One of these reasons is that the seafarer is always on call when at sea, as Participant G notes:

> *On a ship you are kind of, you're always on call, aren't you? You know, the fire alarm could go any minute of which is that you're in a deep sleep. And you're, you know, like, I mean, we all have roles, obviously on board a ship if the ships on fire, you know, then you have to just spring into action.*

Participant G describes how seafarers must be ready to spring into action. Springing into action means to begin doing something suddenly or become active very quickly. As Participant G notes, this could be even if the seafarer is in a deep sleep. There is no warning or preparation time. Taking this one step further, Participant F describes that seafarers *live* on call, when at sea. This is a powerful statement considering that seafarers live for months on board:

> *And I think as seafarers, we know, this, we had put in the back of our mind that something could happen every any minute. I think I said, last time, I think I said to you that Yeah, you're living on call. I mean, we know it can happen. We know, just something bang, and off we go.*

Participant F is, in essence, saying that seafarers are on call for up to eight months at a time. Both participants also point out that the knowledge that the alarm could go off at any moment is something of which they are constantly aware. It seems that even if the alarm never sounds, the mere fact that it could at any time is also a stressor. Participant G describes how this requires some kind of management, each seafarer choosing a specific way to deal with the fact that a dangerous situation could happen at any time:

> *You fall asleep with a listening ear. Or you pre-plan, I mean some guys sleep naked...sometimes it's easier if you just have a T-shirt on, you know, have your trousers right next to just in case the alarm goes off….*

it's like you've got to be a coiled spring because you don't know when it's gonna happen.

Participant G's metaphor of a coiled spring highlights the immense pressure on seafarers – they must always be ready for an emergency. There is no time to relax or experience a release from pressure – even sleeping requires a management plan. Participant L describes how this plays on her mind.

When you are at home, you can sit in front of the TV, and you can switch off. Whereas at sea, my mind is working all the time about work and what's going on and stuff I need to do all the time. Like occasionally I just sort of stop and stare out to sea and I think to myself - could I? I would never. No. I love my life. But it's just one of those errant thoughts.

Participant L notes here that it is difficult to switch off and relax on board – her mind is always working. This appears to have a significant impact on her from a psychological perspective. Her mind is constantly working, and this seems to take its toll. Another factor here is the nature of Participant L's thoughts, over and above the fact that her mind is always working. What Participant L seems to be describing in this comment is taking her own life by jumping overboard – she describes how she occasionally looks out at sea and asks herself if she could do something like that. As she notes, it is one of those errant thoughts, and this is how she seems to make sense of this experience. She seems to file it away as a fleeting annoyance. Alternatively, could it be that Participant L is far more distressed than she seems to realise when she is on board?

Participant G believes that this part of her job prepared her for motherhood, something to which her friends battled to adjust. Because of her experience at sea, Participant G found adjusting to the constant need to be available and present as a new mother simple in comparison to her role at sea:

Participant G: I mean, you are and you have your downtime, that's laid out, if you're working 12 hours on and 12 hours off. But that 12 hours off, in essence, you are on call because a fire alarm might go off at any time. But that's just part and parcel of the job. I mean, maybe being a mom helps with that. Because obviously, if I'm

asleep, I'm still listening out for I definitely think that my job helped prepare me for motherhood.
Researcher: Really?
Participant G: Oh, for sure. You know, I would see mom friends and they were struggling with sleep deprivation. And there's me having been working six hours on six hours off for like, you know, like, the majority of my career, you know, so you're trying to catch those, like three and a half hours of sleep here and there and what have you, or changing from day shift to night shift and night shift to day shift? You know, it messes with your sleep pattern, so, you know, the babies mess with your sleep pattern.

Participant J describes how difficult he finds constantly being on call because even on a Sunday, typically a day of rest, he must be available. He finds this exhausting:

So I'm kind of the middleman between, totally, you know, total management and total working by hand. And so we're in the middle. So for me, it's like if anything goes wrong on the ship. The first person they call is me. So even if it's a Sunday, or let's say the chief officer started doing something on some machinery and I got a call, oh, this is not working. You have to get out of bed and you have to deal with it. Can't say okay, I'll do it later. Not having even that one day of prolonged sleep. It kind of like you know, stacks up over a period of time. So we were all physically exhausted.

Another reason for the intensity of the job, and one that is closely related to the first reason, is that dangerous situations are always imminent, creating a *what if* scenario with which the seafarer must live constantly. Even small mistakes could have dire consequences. Participant F explains his experience of this:

At sea, you don't, we don't have a fire department, we don't have a doctor or paramedic around the corner, we have to deal with everything that's thrown at us. So it's this whole "what if?" scenario and you realise that if a fire happens, the chances of us saving that vessel are within the first three to four minutes.

On board, mistakes, even minor ones, could have disastrous repercussions on human lives, financially and environmentally. The responsibility on the seafarer is enormous. Participant F explains:

> *Because our ships are so big, the last ship I was on was relatively small, was… she was 200 metres long. That… that was relatively small for me, the one before was 350 metres long and 60 metres – 53 metres wide. So they, it's huge machines and for that time I'm navigating. I've got 24 lives that are in my hand and if I make a decision that's incorrect, I could put all 24 people plus millions of dollars of cargo and ship at jeopardy. And that's the most stressful part when I'm working.*

It is evident in this quote that Participant F feels a sense of personal responsibility – he uses the personal pronoun, *I*. While it takes a crew of at least 12 seafarers to navigate a cargo ship during a shift, Participant F notes that it is he who has 24 lives in his hands, not, for example, he and the captain, or he and the chief engineer. Participant J is also keenly aware of the lives at stake, as a senior officer in charge of cadets. Like Participant F, Participant J feels this sense of personal responsibility:

> *So you are dealing with other people's stresses, but obviously as senior officer you are in charge of them, you want to make sure they are safe because if something happens to them, you are responsible. That's the nature of the job. So I really found myself in the position where I had to take care of these young cadets, to be honest.*

From an environmental perspective, Participant K explains how he finds the nature of the work stressful in this regard, especially when he works near oil rigs:

> *Participant K: I think it's just the nature of the work sometimes, but like, obviously what we do will be quite stressful when it goes wrong. Yes. Because obviously we're like near oil rigs…mistakes are quite environmentally damaging enough. It's always on your mind.*
> *Researcher: Okay. Yeah, that's definitely a unique job stress.*
> *Participant K: Yeah. It's one of those things that you don't tend to think about. But you always niggling there that it could happen.*

Participant K's use of the word niggling is noteworthy. A niggle can be defined as a slight but persistent discomfort or annoyance. The point here is that the annoyance is constant, with the repercussions of any mistakes being potentially catastrophic. Participant D notes that the intensity of the role and the critical nature of the work affects even the crew's process of conflict resolution:

> *And if you have a different disagreement with someone, you know, with regards issues of mediation and things like that, you have to deal with it there and then you can't dwell on it. You can't dwell on it. You can't have a punch up. You can't wait two weeks to resolve it. You are on a mission – the mission is critical. You need to get on with life and resolve things.*

The fact that–mistakes could have such huge repercussions in so many areas (on human life, environmentally and financially) is another stressor unique to the industry. Many professions, for example, the medical profession, involve being responsible for people's lives. The uniqueness with regards to the maritime industry is that it's not only one or two lives at stake. As Participant F notes, he is responsible for the lives of the entire crew (up to 25 people) as well as millions of dollars' worth of cargo and equipment, and the delicate marine environment.

The third reason that seafaring is so intense is that the actual tasks involved in navigating a ship are hugely stressful. This is one factor that might be more applicable to captains and pilots of cargo ships. Participant F, a pilot on a cargo ship, explains the experience of navigating a cargo ship off the shore of China:

> *I have to make sure that we don't have a collision. And that can be the most stressful time of the day, if I can put it that way, or my time at sea. As soon as you enter China and until you exit China you're at high stress, because Chinese seafarers, it seems like there's a total different rulebook that I've never read, while you get there. China is incredibly busy when it comes to shipping lanes and there are ships everywhere. And you just have to hou kop[5] if I can put it that way. It's for four hours and you are constantly on the go. You are looking for ships constantly. It's just sort of do as you can and hopefully you'll come out alive.*

[5] An Afrikaans phrase roughly translated to mean *hold yourself together.*

While Participant F may have been intending to be facetious in his comment about coming out alive from the situation, the dangers involved in navigating a 220 000-tonne cargo ship through a busy shipping lane cannot be ignored. Participant G describes her experience as a first officer on a cargo ship, noting that some people could not handle the stress of her role at sea, the handling of which is merely an expected part of her role.

> *Participant G: So I go over to Calais and that is a hell of a busy shipping lane. Really busy shipping lane. As soon as you come out of the harbour, you're pretty much straight into traffic and that is stressful and that stress, you know, like some people can't, people don't like that pressure, that stress, you know, it's 3, 4 or 5 ships on a collision course. Then fishing vessels thrown into the mix, and then you've got the other lane where ships are, then suddenly coming up the other side. But as you're passing, you're like, you've just cleared that lot. And you're into another fresh lot of possible collisions. You know, so I believe there are some people who can't cope, like those kind of situations.*
> *Researcher: How do you cope with it?*
> *Participant G: How do I cope with it? I just have to, you know, if you don't, if you don't deal with it, you collide and you know, you just take it up as it comes.*

Participant G's response to my question regarding how she copes seems to suggest that she has limited options in managing the situation. The first is to cope and the second is to collide with another ship. This is not much of a choice in the management of a potentially life-threatening situation. Interestingly, despite the dangers present, some of the participants describe how the intensity of the job can be very exciting. Participant G describes her experience:

> *So this one's passing ahead of us, then we've got these two coming down, right? Well, this one's coming down at this speed and this one coming down at that speed. So yeah, how do I deal with it? You just take it as it comes, you know, and if anything, I kind of find it a little bit exciting. Because you know, it's just like, ok whew well that one? Yeah bring it on type thing.*

The term, *bring it on*, is normally used to express confidence in meeting a challenge. It seems that navigating the ship through a crowded shipping lane ignites in Participant G the thrill of a challenge, which she wants to face head on. Likewise, Participant F, who initially describes how stressful he finds navigating a ship through China shipping lanes, later notes that this is a situation in which he also thrives:

> *But you're at liberty to make your own decisions out there. And when I'm navigating that ship, it's - I'm making the decisions of where that ship's going. And even though it's a stressful environment, I thrive in that stress. People hate going to China. I love it. It's an adrenaline rush, navigating through that.*

In sum, whether seafarers find the adrenaline rush enjoyable or not, the seafarer is vulnerable to a considerable amount of stress involved with a high-intensity job. Emergency situations like fire or injury are always imminent. Mistakes have huge repercussions on human life, financially and environmentally. Finally, the actual tasks involved, such as navigating a ship through a crowded shipping lane, can only be described as high pressure, particularly for captains and pilots.

7.3.5 Sub-theme B4: *As soon as that date moves, it just throws you out*

Seafarers have an idea of when they will be signed off the ship and allowed to return home. While it might not be an exact date, this is a very significant piece of information for the seafarer. Sign off means home and family, and is, understandably, a happy day for many seafarers, as noted by Participant D:

> *It's amazing, how it's a huge mood changer, you get the email onboard, and I've got it now, when I was on board now. And we've got an email saying the guy that was relieving me couldn't come. And you just feel your heart breaks because you've been planning for it you have been working. The happiest day that a seafarer gets is when he's on the gangway leaving the ship. The saddest is when he joins because he has left everyone behind starting his job and everything.*

Participant F compares it to the last day of the school term, universally seen as a time of celebration and joy, and often the happiest day for school children:

> *There's always a bit of a sign off day, like the last day of school. Feeling like you are the happiest guy on board and everyone else is just like looking daggers at you, because they wish they were the people signing off. And it happens to be as well when the other guy signed off, I am still here for longer. So, it's that one day, which is always funny. But the happiest day everyone smiles and sign off there.*

Both participants describe sign off day as the happiest day. It seems, therefore, that having a sign off date in mind, even if it is an approximate date, is also helpful in managing the stress of being away from home. This is evident in how Participant J describes his experience:

> *You know if it's going to end by the end of this month, you are ok with it. You are reconciled with the facts. Ok it's another two weeks. It's another three weeks.*

Participant J uses the word *reconciled.* This can be defined as submitting to or accepting something unpleasant. It seems that having a sign off date is used by Participant J as a coping mechanism to deal with the unpleasant experience of being away from home – it is something he submits to or accepts, while quite literally counting down the weeks towards this date. Both Participant A and Participant C also describe this date in a way that indicates its important role in a seafarer's accepting this negative aspect to the career:

> *Participant A: I think if there was no definite end date, it was just open ended. And if you have an end date, then you can you can prepare for it. You can you have that definite end in sight. But when it's open ended, you don't really know how to keep yourself going mentally. Because it could go on for months and months. You don't want to burn yourself out.*

> *Participant C: Especially kind of in your mind, you don't mind being away for the time, but you know, okay, this is the end time we're working towards. You can accept it.*

Participant I notes that this helps her not only to prepare mentally, but to make the best of the situation:

And you know, it's going to be six months or four months, you need to actually train your brain to make the best of this four months and earn the most that you can.

Participant F compares the sign off date to a goalpost towards which the seafarer can work, also indicating that working towards even an estimated sign off date could decrease perceived stress intensity. He explains how it is so much easier to be at sea if you have a date towards which to work:

And it's so much easier saying I'm going home in November, because then you can work towards it. It is the goal post. Then [name of company] said we'll try and sign you off in a month. They got to that goalpost and the goalpost was just moved further.

Since a sign off date seems to make being at sea so much easier, it does make sense that stories are shared between seafarers regarding times when a seafarer has been signed off the ship but then asked to return. Participant C describes a few stories he has heard about this experience:

And as simple as for when there is this case within the company where the guy has come up the gangway, and can also say sorry, something happens, he's done. Or there's been a few stories of guys on the way to the airport, and then turned around it back again. Oh, sorry, something happened, you've got to come back to ship again. So you've got all that planning out and it just falls away.

The sense of disappointment must be severe for a seafarer who has planned to return home. As Participant C notes, all the planning ''just falls away''. Participant K describes this experience as the worst thing a seafarer can hear:

Participant K: The second you can't go home... that's...for a seafarer probably the worst thing that you can tell them.
Researcher: Oh, really? Okay.
Participant K: Probably. It's probably yeah, yeah. Especially like if you've been there expecting it. I mean, all of a sudden, flights get cancelled or you just can't get flights.

Participant E seems to concur with this in his description of the same situation:

> *With the delayed sign off, I've had that as well where you kind of like working, you set your mind to it. Halfway through my contract, they changed my sign off date on the system to the sixth of October. And I was like, Oh, I'm going home. Three months. It was a three-month trip. And I started phoning the office and everything and they're like, hold on, let us see. Let us see. And then it turned out Oh, sorry. Was an error. And that error as small as it may be, was crushing. It was you had all your hopes up, you're like, wow, I'm going home.*

Participant E's usage of the word *crushing* indicates how overwhelming the sense of disappointment can be. It seems, as Participant K explains, that it may well be one of the worst things for Participant E to hear. Interestingly, Participant B describes delayed sign off using the same word:

> *With the delayed sign off, I've had that as well where you kind of like you working you set your mind to it. And then if you just get that email through, it's absolutely like crushing.*

Participant E goes on to describe how this crushing experience can have serious consequences on the seafarer's mental health:

> *And so I had to wait another two months longer to get back to be able to sign off. Yeah, so that's just the instant extension on board, which is not really ideal. So that's like that's one of the big ones that kind of if guys are bit stressed, that one is the one that just shoots the guys over the edge because it's just completely demoralising. Especially kind of in your mind, you don't mind being away for the time, but you know, okay, this is the end time we're working towards that you can accept it.*

Participant E describes here how a delayed sign off could be the factor that results in a seafarer reaching breaking point. Participant F reiterates this idea that it is the mental health of the seafarer that is at stake in this situation:

> *But because of situations like this, [the shipping company] realise that what's going to be the biggest impact is the mental health on board, the high stress environment, the minimal sleep, creates a point a breaking point. And a lot of the guys were reaching this breaking point because there was no news of when they are going home. They knew they would go home sometime, but it was there was no news of when. And it's so much easier saying I'm going home in November, because then you can work towards it. It is the goal post. Then [shipping company] said we'll try and sign you off in a month. They got to that goalpost and the goalpost was just moved further. And this is what is breaking the guys.*

One of the reasons that delayed sign off could have a negative impact on seafarer mental health could be that it is not only the seafarer who is affected by delayed sign off, but the seafarer's family as well. Participant A sheds further light on this:

> *You might have told your family that you're coming home on this date. So they start to prepare mentally for you coming home, and then suddenly it's another few weeks.*

Delayed sign off can also potentially contribute to a higher risk of accidents on board through decreased job performance. Participant G explains:

> *But as soon as that date moves, it just throws you out because now any problems just become so much more. So you lose your focus quite a bit on that. It's just like you don't have the energy. And you just don't really care about the work. You are just over it. Yeah that's how accidents happen.*

Losing focus on board, where even small mistakes can be catastrophic, is one of the ways accidents can occur. It seems to impact the attitude of the seafarer; as Participant G notes, problems become bigger once the sign off date has been moved, and it is an indifferent attitude that can cause an increased risk of accidents.

COVID-19 seems to have exacerbated the impact of this stressor. Delayed sign-off has become a common experience for seafarers since the start of the pandemic. Participant J explains his experience:

> *So towards the last month, for me the last month was the hardest. Because there was still no end in sight. It got really frustrating. Because there were no clear answers. No clear timelines. And all you get on the ships are these horror stories from your friends. From the news media, and the numbers in India were skyrocketing during those months. They were insane.*

The importance of a known sign-off date is reiterated here in what Participant J says. He notes that there were no clear timelines and no clear answers, emphasising the confusion he was feeling. His confusion was compounded by horror stories from home about COVID numbers. He also notes here that not having an end in sight was particularly stressful for him. Participant L comments on her crewmates who experienced delayed time at sea because of COVID-19:

> *You could see them mentally decline. Whereas because obviously, they just spending so much time away* [from home]. *Like a five-week trip turned into a 10-week trip. And then you've got no mental preparation for it.*

Again, the idea of mental preparation is emphasised here. It is a necessary component of a successful trip, it seems. A sign off date is absolutely vital to a seafarer's ability to prepare mentally for their time at sea.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, a sign off date, even if it is just an estimate, could be an integral part of supporting seafarers on board. First, it seems to be used by some seafarers as a coping mechanism to deal with the extended time away from home and family. Second, the impact of a delayed sign off could be, as two participants describe, crushing, and have a negative impact on seafarer mental health. Finally, delayed sign off could result in decreased job performance and increased risk of accidents on board.

7.3.6 Conclusion

This section presented four occupational stressors evident in what the participants shared. First, food on board is hugely influential, and this is an occupational stressor fairly unique to the industry. Poor quality food on board can have a negative impact on seafarer wellness and mental health. In contrast, healthy food of good quality can act as a coping mechanism for seafarers, giving them something to look forward to and also boosting morale amongst the crew. A second occupational stressor that is fairly unique is that seafarers are the unseen and

the unknown, and this lack of recognition is experienced as stressful. Seafarers play a significant role in the distribution of goods globally, making huge personal sacrifices to do so, yet what they do is not acknowledged to the degree it should be. Third, the role itself can certainly be considered as a high-intensity role for several reasons already discussed in this section. Fourth, delayed sign-off can be a very stressful event for a seafarer, having both a psychological impact and resulting in increased risk for accidents at sea.

7.4 GET C: Lived experiences of well-being

7.4.1 Introduction

Evident in the participants' descriptions of their experiences are positive aspects of human experience and functioning. Many of the participants either directly expressed or indirectly illustrated an ability to overcome negative emotions such as anxiety, worry and doubt to cope with what they faced at sea. The participants describe this ability in a variety of ways. Participant D, for example, explains how he can *pigeonhole* things.

> *Everyone will have their own coping mechanisms. And since my military career, a lot of that has been around pigeonholing things I call it. So, there's a drawer and you can put those things in that drawer, and you can shut that drawer up in that cupboard.*

Participant J also describes this ability to cope with difficulties by putting on a smile and focusing on the job at hand:

> *So, I have been at sea now for almost ten years now and I feel that I have evolved, even if you have a bad day, tomorrow another day, you put on a smile, you work with the crew because you are in charge.*

This seems to be a skill that Participant J has learned. As he notes, he has evolved after being at sea for almost ten years. Participant I explains her experience of putting the job first:

> *So, you are tired, you don't feel well, you, you have your period, you have lots of things going on for you. And you have to put your emotions aside and you have to deal with other people first, you have to put them first. So, it's not like at home you can creep up in your bed. I don't know if you you know how you feel when you're on your period.*

And you just want your mom. But you have to put them first… you need to do the job.

Both Participant J and Participant I describe being able to put emotion aside and focus on the crew or the job at hand. Participant L describes how she can put her ‘‘big girl pants’’ on:

I wouldn't think I am anxious person naturally. I find that you know you just look at yourself in the mirror and you go… you know… put your big girl pants on and deal with it. You just have to wake up and you crack on.

Regardless of how it is described, the question is, *how exactly is this done by these seafarers?* How, for example, does Participant I put her negative emotions aside, as she describes, to cope with the stressors of her job? This GET includes sub-themes that appear to contribute to the psychological functioning of these individuals. These are specific skills or behaviours that support these participants in dealing with the negative aspects of working at sea, potentially contributing to their high levels of psychological well-being.

7.4.2 Sub-theme C1: *Don't let the little man in your heads live there for free*

Choosing to have a positive attitude appears to be a key factor in resisting and overcoming negative emotions. Participant G explains:

But like that the chief officer that I was sailing with at that time, and he would say, he would say something like, "don't let the little man in your heads live there for free". It was almost like, he can't, he has to pay rent to live there. But don't let him live there for free. He doesn't deserve to live there. Something to that effect anyway. And why do I just keep battling for those like, scenarios in my head? You know, find the logical outcome, reason, whatever, you know, and deal with it. Find the silver lining. I'm a big fan of finding silver linings in any situation.

Participant G's attitude towards things is to find the positive, and to deal with the reasons behind the negative thoughts. She deals with negative thoughts by identifying them and dealing with them, after which she seeks out the positive in the situation, and this was something that one of her chief officers taught her. Participant E also focuses on dealing with negative thoughts and low mood, and focusing on the positive, on what can be learnt, and on what comes next. He also notes that this is something he has learned:

> *Like those depressed moods, those fearful moods, those things of "what am I doing with my life", all those questions that could have an effect of just pushing into the ground and not being able to stand up again. So mentally health, the seafarer needs to be resilient. You need to learn to bounce back, need to get a punch in the face, but be able to stand up again and bounce back and say, "All right. Okay, what's next, let's learn from this instead of letting me just stay on the ground". Because you face that a lot.*

In Participant E's case, he focuses on the positive by, more specifically, exploring how he can learn from a negative experience. Participant I does the same:

> *So you need to see the positive behind things. And sometimes it's a little bit hard at times. So I also think when it comes to a learning opportunity, you need to grab whatever opportunity there is. There is a window for that, it depends on how you see things.*

Participant I notes here that taking hold of the learning opportunity in a difficult situation really depends on the way one sees things, reiterating the idea that a positive attitude is a significant component in resisting or overcoming negative emotions and stress on board. She also goes on to speak about how she ''trains her brain'' to cope with the good or the bad:

> *Participant I: But coming back to your question, you have to basically train your brain to cope, to cope with good, nice and to cope with a bad day.*
> *Researcher: Can you maybe give me an example of a situation where you did that?*
> *Participant I: Say for instance, you made a mistake or an error. First of all, in any case, whether it's on the ship or at land, never to take things too personally, because then you feel sorry for yourself and that, but it's difficult in the beginning. What can I learn from this?*

How she trains her brain is not clear. Perhaps this is through self-talk or depersonalising the criticism. Participant I appears to have trained herself to cope with life at sea by focusing on the positive or what can be learnt from the situation. She does not actually provide an example of a specific situation, despite my asking for it. It is speculated that this might be telling – perhaps part of training her brain to cope also means avoiding thinking about specific

examples, thus avoiding the discomfort that this may bring. If this were the case, it would imply that there is a certain degree of avoidance to Participant I's coping with life at sea.

Participant L also speaks about the importance of attitude for a seafarer:

> *As a woman, it depends on your constitution, you know? Whether or not you kind of like thick-skinned or if you going to take things personally. You kind of learn to roll along with the punches over time. After 15 years, I have kind of like have a devil may care attitude. Seafaring does require you have to be a little hardened as a person, but obviously that only comes with time. You start as a junior and you are all soft and take everything personally and you are still learning and everything and then 15 years down the line, you have been through it all you have seen it all, you have dealt with it all, it all just kind of like rolls off you back, kind of thing. So it really depends on the person.*

Participant L describes her attitude as one that is carefree and casual. Like Participant I, she has trained herself to cope by focusing on her attitude. At the same time, and again like Participant I, there could be a degree of avoidance to Participant L's coping style. Does she focus on the positive, or does she ignore the negatives? Perhaps it is both. Perhaps for these participants, distancing or detaching from the situation might serve as an effective coping mechanism.

Participant L's comment is also noteworthy when considering how women seafarers deal with working in male-dominated environment. Her comment here was in response to being asked specifically about dealing with any stress related to being a woman seafarer in the maritime industry. It could be quite telling that her response to this question highlighted first and foremost her attitude towards the situation, rather than any external resource, such as turning to support from a supervisor. It is wondered whether this is owing to there being minimal support for women seafarers, who must learn to ''*roll with the punches*'' rather than address any stress related to being a minority on board through other means.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, it is noted that this ability to focus on the positive was only mentioned by four of the participants. However, this sub-theme is still noteworthy as it does seem as if these four participants have trained themselves to adopt this skill at sea, thus potentially presenting it as a useful, teachable skill for others in the industry who may not have

yet learnt this skill. Since this appears to act as a buffer against occupational stressors experienced in the industry, this could be a significant finding. At the same time, it may also be the case that, for these participants, focusing on the positive involves a degree of avoidance of the negative. Avoiding the negatives through not dwelling on them might be a manner of coping that works well for these seafarers, even though avoidant coping is normally considered maladaptive.

7.4.3 Sub-theme C2: *You learn to recognise certain triggers*

Five of the participants refer to being self-aware. This involves being aware of one's feelings and being able to analyse one's thoughts and emotions. Participant A speaks about this self-awareness:

> *Participant A: I try and make sure I get out running three or four times a week, because physical exercise, I think, is one of the most important things behind good mental health.*
> *Researcher: And how did you know to do that? I mean, like did someone teach you or, you know, did it just come naturally to you?*
> *Participant A: I think it's a mixture of you learned, you know, yourself better than anybody else. You learn to recognise certain triggers may be where you feel like you're going down a little bit in your mood.*

Learning to recognise when his mood dips is important for Participant A because he is then able to do something about it, such as exercise. Participant H describes the same kind of mood-monitoring as Participant A:

> *And see, you need to be able to notice yourself when you're taking a dip or when you're not focusing on your job, as well, in terms of safety.*

Both participants describe this is a specific skill: Participant A refers to it is something he has learned, and Participant H describes it as something a seafarer must be able to do. Participant C also notes that this is something that a seafarer must know how to do.

> *And so like the bad stuff is going to happen. But I think the important part is just knowing how to deal with it.... Not to hide it away but kind of go to the chief engineer or to go with someone that's on a higher rank that control the situation to be like, okay you're not stable at the*

moment, we're not going to put you down at the meetings, we're not going to put you at the controls or anything like that.

Participant C describes his experience of dealing with any distress he feels on board by knowing how to be self-aware and being open with senior officers when he is not doing well. Doing so affords Participant C the opportunity to receive support in the form of a break from more intense tasks on board so that he can overcome difficult emotions or stress. Participant C is clearly comfortable with admitting when he is not coping, and asking for the help he needs, and this starts with being aware of his feelings in the first place. Participant I is the same with her feelings. She describes being open about things and links this to good self-knowledge and self-awareness:

Yah. I would like to think that I am also mentally self-aware. I don't block things out, I am very open about things. If people ask me questions and whatever. I am not secretive about anything. My family know everything. Its – I can just look at myself and it's just sort of you know what – this is how you are going to deal with it. A good sense of self-knowledge. Self-awareness. I know what I am capable of.

Managing thoughts and feelings (and thus being aware of them) is so important that Participant E believes one who is unable to do so should not be a seafarer. She identifies it as a key characteristic of someone who works at sea:

Yeah, you need to be strong. Like, if you if you can't manage with negative thoughts or dark thoughts, let's put it that way, or know how to handle them, then seafaring isn't definitely not a place to be. You hundred percent will fade. Like those depressed moods, those fearful moods, those things of "what am I doing with my life", all those questions that could have an effect of just pushing into the ground and not being able to stand up again.

Participant E seems to imply here that her thoughts must be handled with a certain degree of mental strength. Could it be that she uses this mental strength to manage the negative thoughts through pushing them away or avoiding them? This is suggested because of her preference to remain in the abstract, rather than mention specific examples. Interestingly, all these participants chose to talk mostly in an abstract way about coping, without providing me with specific examples of exactly how they do this, despite my asking. For example, Participant

C speaks about the bad ‘‘*‘stuff*’ and Participant I mentions how she does not block ‘‘*things”* out. This lack of specifics could suggest that the approach is about not letting the thoughts get the better of one, avoiding thinking about specifics through mental strength and resilience. If this is the case, then some of these participants are both aware and unaware at the same time. While being aware of their feelings and thoughts, they also choose to be unaware of difficult thoughts and feelings through mental strength or resilience. This is illustrated in Participant L’s description of being self-aware:

> *Participant L: So to me, and also I self-analyse quite a lot. Like introspection and all that type of stuff. So I am very aware of myself. So I don’t feel that I suffer in that kind of way. I don’t sit and linger in the dark stretch for long. My mentality, my personal mentality, is most of the time I am just sort of cruising along and then every now and again, especially like now building up to going back to work, there is a bit of a dip into the darkness.*
> *Researcher: How do you do that?*
> *Participant L: Um, my mentality, my personal mentality, is most of the time I am just sort of cruising along and then every now and again, especially like now building up to going back to work, there is a bit of a dip into the darkness. That is just sort like the anxiety building up of having to go back to work and you know the travelling, the international travelling. Especially now that COVID is such a big pain in the butt. The pain and inconvenience of everything. I wouldn’t think I am anxious person naturally. I find that you know you just look at yourself in the mirror and you go… you know… put your big girl pants on and deal with it. You just have to wake up and you crack on.*

Participant L’s comment here is somewhat contradictory. She speaks of being self-aware and claims to self-analyse and engage in introspection. However, she also claims to have a cruise-along mentally, which implies that she goes along with things without too much introspection. She does not linger on things. Could it be the case that she is introspective, but this introspection does not spill into ruminating, thus she is self-aware and self-unaware at the same time? In other words, she knows herself and what is going on mentally, but this does not involve negative thought patterns that can be considered repetitive or immersive, otherwise referred to as rumination. It is also wondered if she is perhaps not as self-aware as

she thinks she is. Perhaps her cruise along mentality is a means to manage her stress, and this cruise mentality is closer to denial of difficult thoughts rather than being aware of them.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, self-awareness seems to be a key component to the well-being of these participants. It affords these participants the chance to then engage in some kind of activity to boost their mood, such as exercising or talking to a supportive colleague. These participants can monitor their moods and then respond when becoming anxious or depressed. This is a key component of cognitive therapy, and thus it seems like an effective strategy. At the same time, a degree of self-*un*awareness seems to benefit these participants who are then prevented from engaging in ruminating.

7.4.4 Sub-theme C3: *So that is what I work for*

Seven of the 12 participants mentioned finding a sense of purpose and meaning in their role as a seafarer. This seems to be a powerful antidote to the stress of the job that ensures high levels of well-being in these participants. The participants find meaning and purpose in different ways. Participant J and Participant D have both spent many years in the industry working as a captain and engineer respectively. Both men continue to find meaning and purpose in their careers for the reason they became seafarers in the first place. Participant J was and still is motivated by a desire for adventure and a love for the sea:

> *You had a passion for the sea. I never knew what is seafaring and never knew what is. None from my family is from a seafaring background for me to choose this industry. So my dad used to take me to the beach and get me some coffee, some snacks and take me home. I always used to see the ships in the anchorage. But I never knew it was an anchorage and I didn't know anything. So I always felt to know that I used to see the horizon. And I just wanted to see what's behind the horizon. So my destiny took me here. I was very passionate. I even to this day love the sea and love the ship.*

Participant J associates his career choice with a happy childhood memory. It is almost as if his career choice honours the memory of his father. This association with a nostalgic memory might explain why he sees it as his destiny – it was always meant to be. Participant J also describes himself as passionate about being a seafarer, and it is a passion that developed as he spent time at the harbour as a young boy. Passion is a strong emotion that can direct behaviour. It is closely related to purpose and motivation, and Participant J notes that even to this day, he still loves the sea and ship. Participant J believes so strongly that cadets should

have a passion for the sea that he advocates for this passion to be instilled in them somehow. He believes that people who do not have this passion for the sea and the industry are the wrong people for the job:

> *Participant J: I'm an old timer. During my time at sea the training was entirely different. They never told us when you go on the ship, you're going to make money. You had a passion for it. Today that is somehow lost. When I go to colleges, I talk to students. So I ask them: Oh, what is that prompted you to pick up this profession? So they tell me there is plenty money. Now these are not the right people that are supposed to be at sea.*
> *Researcher: What do you mean?*
> *Participant J: Money you can get anywhere today. I personally feel that if we can train them up when they are young, when they are at the college if we can put our efforts, I'm not saying a hundred out of a hundred will become efficient, but majority of them we can create this passion into them. This is one thing we should instil in the seafarers.*

Participant J links having a passion for the sea with being efficient. He believes that cadets who are motivated by this passion for the sea, and not by financial gain, will be more effective on board. He did not expand on his choice of the word, efficient, but in this participant's mind, there is a ''right'' and a ''wrong'' person when it comes to working at sea. Interestingly, he implies here that the right person to work at sea is one who is open to developing a passion for the job, and not necessarily one who already has this passion. This contrasts with how he describes developing his passion, which was through spending time at sea watching ships on the horizon as a young boy. He does note in this quote that the training he had was very different from what is offered to cadets today. Perhaps being instructed by old timers as he describes himself, supported him in growing this budding passion.

Participant D finds meaning in constantly bettering himself through professional development and challenging work experiences. He initially joined the industry because of the challenge that seafaring presented him:

> *So for me it was probably my own psyche or my reality. I felt that, how can I push myself? How can I do the best? How can I be the best I can? What is the best? So it's the same as like the forces like marine commandos or something, if you want to be a warrior, or a soldier,*

> *where's the best. So you join a parachute regiment, or you join the marines. It's about pushing yourself and exceeding because you know you have that courage or that motivation. When you have that mindset from a kid, that's what you want to do.*

After many years in the industry, Participant D's mindset of being better remains:

> *And coming on a ship in an alien environment, in harsh weather, sometimes for long hours, and now many months, to achieve something, which will place people in a different package, shall we say, than the person that says, "Well, I'm just going to work in a factory down the road". Don't get me wrong, they're very good vocations. Same as going to medical, whatever. So I'm not… some jobs some do have a lot of those assets, but for a seafarer that's already sacrificing not being able to go home at night to see his family, I will strive to do and be the best I can.*

Participant D seems to make sense of the harsh conditions and the sacrifices he makes by pushing himself to be the best he can. It could be speculated that this combination of service and self-improvement is what makes both the sacrifice and the risk worthwhile. He also seems to take pride in the idea that he is in a different "*package"* to other people whose jobs do not include difficult aspects such as harsh weather or an alien environment. He is able to survive in these conditions and others are not. Again, this could be one of the ways he makes sense of the significant sacrifice he makes. This competitive mindset is played out practically through his partaking in continuous, self-funded, professional development that is not mandatory:

> *So as part of lifetime learning I endeavour to always keep my CV up to date, because it has an advantage for me in the marketplace, where there is competition for the roles that I take on board and the leadership role on vessels….so as my CV is always being bettered by personal development.*

While Participant D observes that he attends professional development to ensure he can compete in a competitive job market, his usage of certain words here is noteworthy. He refers to *lifetime learning* which echoes the mindset he had as a child – he wants to be better and to do better, and lifelong learning is a natural part of this. This mindset of *being better* seems to be a powerful motivating force, giving him a sense of meaning and purpose as a seafarer. It

is also argued that a strategy like this is likely to be beneficial especially while establishing a career, but it is wondered if it would be necessary to adopt some new strategy when his career hits a plateau, as most do.

Similarly, Participant F finds meaning and purpose in ensuring that when he joins a ship at the start of his contract, he sets specific goals for himself that are also rooted in being better and pushing himself:

> *Um when I join you have a sign on talk. And they ask you what are your goals and things, and my goal was to leave the ship in a better condition than I found it. I write that for every ship.*

He goes on to explain how this helped him to get through a particularly challenging voyage on a ship that was not in good condition at all and what he calls a *rust bucket*:

> *It was, you know, you looked at it. And you went, Oh, my friends are sailing on the ship that I sailed on the last time, which was a 350 metre mega ship that had I mean, we had a cinema on board. Here I come to this thing where I have to walk sideways down alleyways, nearly because it's so small. There was cockroaches on the engineer's deck. So it was demoralising. But we worked hard. And we did that ship justice.*

Clearly, Participant F feels there is a real point to what he does while he is at sea, and he believes his work makes a difference and is valuable – after all, on his last trip, he *did that ship justice*. This appeared to have helped him manage a situation he called demoralising, and one that could have had a negative impact on his sense of well-being. It could be speculated that his sense of purpose acted as a buffer against a workplace stressor, in this case an unpleasant environment, which was to be his home for months. Like Participant F, Participant L finds meaning in her role through good work ethic. She explains how it is her good reputation that drives her – in her words, *what she works for*:

> *I have joined a ship and the captain is like, "Oh I have heard of you; I was looking forward to sailing with you" and you think to yourself, "I don't know you from a bar of soap". But he has heard that I work hard and that I have got a good work reputation. So that is what I work for.*

Participant G, Participant H, Participant J and Participant E appear to find meaning and purpose in reaching out to others on board. For all four of them, other seafarers form an integral part of the meaning they ascribe to their jobs. Participant G describes herself as an *extrovert*, and notes that she finds meaning in bringing other seafarers together on board through creating a community atmosphere:

> *You know, it's nice to make people teas and coffees and when they're just like "actually I would love one, but I'm just so heavy in these emails that I just don't have time''. You know, and they do appreciate that. I mean, it makes more of a family ethos when you like that and that's kind of like the atmosphere I always like to create. To try and bring everyone in and like the boys are my boys and I'm like their little sister, mother hen or something like that.*

Often one of the only female officers on board, Participant G describes herself as a *mother hen* or *sister* to other seafarers and refers to them as her boys. She sounds quite maternal and protective in her description here, and one of the ways she purposefully plays out this maternal role is by making tea and coffee for her primarily male colleagues. This may be how she finds meaning in her role at sea. Participant G goes on to explain that her attitude towards her colleagues is the primary reason she was put forward for a certain position on an oil rig:

> *And so morale was really low and he* [the captain] *was like, "We need someone like you." Which is nice, you know. And I got the job… I just made it my mission to be like, "Oh morning, can I get you a cup?" Would you like a coffee?" And constantly smiling and like, the guys would be, "How are you this happy?"*

Participant G can make a difference by being very intentional in her behaviour. Her purpose on board is more than merely navigating a vessel as first officer. She seems to find meaning and purpose in being the ''mother hen'' and sister to her colleagues and serving them tea and coffee on board. It is also wondered if this is how Participant G manages being one of the only females on board. Coming into a male-dominated environment could potentially be quite threatening. Perhaps referring to her male colleagues as ''my boys'' is one of the ways she manages this situation. This is because boys could be, by definition, less threatening than men. She then goes one step further in considering herself as a mother or a sister to these boys on board. In this way, she becomes, even if just in her mind, removed from the potential threat of sexual harassment. Behaving in a maternal or sisterly manner towards her male

colleagues might also further benefit her as it communicates to them the boundaries of the relationship. At the same time, it is wondered to what degree her doing this highlights sexism in the industry. To what extent does this female seafarer have to subjugate herself through making tea and coffee for her male colleagues to fit in? If this is indeed what is happening, her way of fitting in might be perpetuating traditional gender roles.

Participant H and Participant J have also chosen to focus on their colleagues, more specifically the cadets with whom they work. These inexperienced seafarers are vulnerable in that they have very little (if any) sea exposure. Participant J explains:

> *Because they were first time at sea and I personally feel kids these days, you know they are addicted to social media. They like to be sociable. So I found these cadets. On a few occasions, these cadets came to me and said I am not feeling so good today. They were not physically ill, just mentally exhausted, you know.*

Participant J goes on to describe how he purposefully and intentionally arranges games and recreation when he is on board to support the cadets and other crew members:

> *So what I do on my ship is I encourage people to take part in games, like we were at anchor almost two months outside Nigeria, because Nigeria was locked up. We got hold of some cricket bats and tennis balls.*

Participant J also notes that his cadets and the rest of the crew have a level of trust in him that appears meaningful to him:

> *Coming to me and talking about family problems, that my crew has that level of comfort, that they trust me with things. I couldn't help them all, but they talk to me anyway. Thinking of some of the people I sailed with, if I was going through something. I would not go to them.*

He seems to take pride in this, noting that he has been on board with some people he would not go to for support the way these cadets have come to him. Perhaps the meaning he seems to find in reaching out to these cadets is more than in just supporting them. It could be that it provides him with a sense of value. In this way, both he and the cadets he supports benefit.

Participant H also focuses her attention on cadets. Because of her negative experience as a female cadet, Participant H has decided to be a source of support for female cadets on board:

> *I want to be there as a listening post for them. So that I'm working with the company, they can phone me from the ship's phone anytime sort of thing. If they need someone to speak to or just ask advice or even just to sound off. Or you know, just to have somebody that's been through it there for them, because I had nobody when I was going through it.*

It can be suggested that supporting cadets seems to instil in both Participant J and Participant H a sense of meaning and purpose, even though this is not something they explicitly express in the interviews. They seem aware of the fact that they can make a difference and they appear to direct their behaviour in ways to ensure that they do so. Participant E's motivation is also supporting other seafarers. His motivation is religious in nature:

> *And that's probably the biggest reason why, a big motivation for me, to go back to the ship is just to share God's word there. How it impacts people's lives and just to encourage them. Almost like a missionary but just using my work as a tool.*

Participant E goes on to explain how having this purpose and meaning in his work has helped him:

> *My drive going back to the ships is to share with people and God and Jesus and all those things. So my motivation, having that as my motivation, it makes it a lot easier because now I have a purpose. And I have something to go do on the ship, not just work and make money.*

Participant E notes that things are much easier now that he has purpose. In contrast to this, he describes a time when he did not have this sense of motivation on board:

> *Before that* [in reference to a meaningful religious experience] *it's really difficult. Because when I didn't have that outlook on life it was really tricky. You would find ways to fill that void. So you either start drinking on the ship or you will engage in stuff that causes bad habits.*

Participant E's point here highlights the significance that meaning and purpose can have in ensuring that seafarers have high levels of wellness. Developing this source of meaning, or outlook on things, has been so significant to Participant E that he describes not having this as *''really tricky''.* His use of the second person when referring to examples of ways to fill this void (such as drinking) places the reader as the central character of the narrative, rather than himself. It is speculated that this is a way of distancing himself from these examples, the memories of which could possibly bring up feelings of discomfort or even guilt. If this is the case, then it is speculated that the sense of meaning he has developed might also serve as a means to protect him from previous experiences on board, the memories of which he would rather forget.

In summary, it seems that having a sense of meaning and purpose could be acting as a powerful antidote to stress for these participants. Whether it is a desire for adventure and a love for the sea or bettering oneself through professional development or challenging work experiences, or even leaving the ship in a better condition after a long voyage, meaning seems to play an important role for these participants. At the same time, meaning also seems to be a complex issue, and the meaning some of the participants find in their work could point to other factors at play. For example, one of the participants described being a mother hen to her male colleagues, which gives her a great sense of purpose, yet it is wondered whether this perpetuates gender norms on board. Another participant describes having turned to religion and sharing his faith on board, and it is wondered how much of this is to manage feelings of guilt related to previous experiences on board that he would rather forget.

7.4.5 Sub-theme C4: *You just got to accept certain things*

Another characteristic that many of the participants appear to possess when it comes to managing stress is their ability to, as Participant F calls it, "*go with the flow*":

> *And it's very much your choice when you wake up in the morning of how you going to attack the day. Are you going to be angry? Are you just going to go with the flow?*

Similarly, Participant K talks about his ability to not ''*stress about the small things*":

> *As your professional experience grows, that you generally get a bit more confident in yourself and don't tend to stress about the small things.*

It could be argued that these two descriptions converge on a central theme – acceptance of reality without an accompanying judgement of the situation being good or bad. Participant C explains:

> *It's not the job, like, the job's gonna get hard, you're going to be sweating, it's going to be difficult conditions that you're working in. But that's most of the time, it's okay, like you accepting that.*

This acceptance of reality as it is helps Participant C to deal with the disappointment of missing important milestones, such as birthdays:

> *My sister's birthday, I'm away as well. So those kinds of things that you're missing those instances, is quite sad. You kind of deal with it just because it's the work you're doing. And you just take it as it comes in. So when you're home, you make up for it as much as you can.*

Participant C accepts that missing important milestones is just part of the work he does, and rather than becoming upset about the situation, he chooses to accept it. Participant C uses the same strategy to manage delayed sign-off:

> *Don't print your flight details. Save it, but don't print it, because it's just going to change. Same with counting down the days. I never count down the days. And then that actually the time does go quite quickly back onboard the ship. You just stay busy.*

He also uses this strategy of acceptance to deal with disappointing food served on board, noting here that it really comes down to perspective:

> *So basically what it all comes down to is you just got to accept certain things and be like, it's not gonna change. I can just change my outlook on it and put tomato sauce on it.*

Participant C could become frustrated with what should be, namely signing off at the time allocated to him and having good food on board. He accepts, however, that the situation is not within his control, and intentionally takes steps to protect himself from becoming too attached to what should happen. Doing this significantly reduces the threat of being disappointed by delayed sign-off and poor-quality food, which (as discussed in a preceding section in this

chapter) are what other participants described as being significant stressors. This is because the sign-off date for these participants (and thus a fixed end point to their time at sea) is one of the ways they seem to cope with being away from home. Participant F communicates something like Participant C regarding delayed sign-off. When Participant F left for his latest voyage in July 2020, he accepted that his standard three-month trip would probably be extended, and he would have difficulties getting home because of the COVID-19 pandemic:

> *But when I left, I left with the notion that I would not be returning before 2021. This was the mindset that I had for myself. And I think that helped. I think realising, the realisation that I'm not coming back immediately, that I won't be sticking to three months, that helped.*

This mindset helped Participant F to deal with the feelings of being away from home for an unusually long time, with no clarity on when he would return. While a sign-off date was not accessible to him as a strategy to cope with being away from home, this protected him from further disappointment. From this it could be speculated that using one's sign-off date as a way to cope with being away from home is potentially putting some seafarers into a position where they are vulnerable to even more stress. This is because these seafarers then not only have to deal with the disappointment of a delayed stay at sea, but their coping mechanism to deal with being away from home is also jeopardised. This makes accepting the reality as it is more difficult since an expectation is created but not met.

Another occupational stressor that some of the participants seem to manage using acceptance is crew conflict. Participant A explains:

> *I've been on quite a few boats where people just don't like each other. And it's not pleasant, but you just at the end of the day, you're there to do your job and you're never gonna like everyone and not everybody's gonna like you.*

Participant A acknowledges that not being liked by everyone on board is not pleasant; however, at the same time he accepts that this is a reality. Participant B notes something like Participant A in his description of conflict on board:

> *So you're going to get upset, you're going to be like now what's wrong. But tomorrow's another day, we move on from there and forward. And now as well, with the ratings that I have on board, I had quite a few*

issues with them. And you still got to work with them. So you got to get past it.

Participant B here describes his strategy of moving forward through grounding himself in life as it is. The reality is that he needs to continue working with the ratings, and thus he chooses not to fixate on what should be instead.

Participant F intentionally coaches his multicultural crew in a form of acceptance of things. He explains that in Filipino culture, pointing at someone is considered very rude. However, Participant F works in a very loud environment in the engine room of the ship, and pointing at the crew members he must lead is sometimes a necessity:

Before we even start leaving the port, I say to the guys: if I point at you, because you don't point at Filipinos, if I point at you or shout at you, I'm not doing it because it's you, I'm doing it because of the job. And I need you guys to understand it's a loud environment, I just want you to hear. And I always start by apologising and saying it might happen.

Participant F asks his Filipino crew mates to understand and accept that certain things he may do, such as pointing at them, are not meant as insults. In doing this, he removes the negative association that Filipinos ascribe to pointing at someone. His Filipino crewmates are then presumably able to accept the behaviour for what it is, and not get caught up in an emotional reaction to what might be culturally offensive.

One of the female participants noted that acceptance of gender discrimination she faces on board is one of the ways that she navigates experiencing this. Participant H explains:

Researcher: Yeah. How do women deal with all of that? I mean, obviously, you mentioned you're a mentor to female cadets, how do they deal with it?
Participant H: Well, for me, I just resigned myself to the thought of, well, you know, you chose this job. So you just get through it. And I didn't enjoy it. In fact, a lot of the time I hated it.

While it is unacceptable that Participant H had to resign herself to be treated unfairly because of her gender, she does highlight that acceptance of a situation does not mean agreement or

affirmation of what has happened. She explains how her viewpoint of things changed when she learnt to accept the reality of the situation:

> *I know this might sound silly but I was sort of thinking, why don't they* [her male crewmates] *like me? Why won't they accept me? And it wasn't anything to do with me. It was the fact that I was [inaudible] as a cadet and I was female.*

Participant H removed her judgement of the mistreatment, seeing it for what it was, instead of as an attack on her personally.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, it seems that when these seven participants accept the reality of stressors in the industry, it protects them from further suffering. It seems that the meaning is removed from the situation, allowing the participant to accept what is. For example, not printing one's plane ticket home seems to make it easier to accept the situation of delayed sign-off since there is less attachment to the fact that there was a specific date set in the first place. Another female participant removed the meaning she had ascribed to being treated differently by her male crewmates, which was that she was somehow to blame, and accepted the reality as is, noting that this is how all female cadets are treated on board. The experiences of these participants point to the idea that acceptance of reality could be a skill that prevents the distress caused by occupational stressors from turning into suffering.

7.4.6 Sub-theme C5: *We talk to each other quite often*

Eight of the participants describe interaction with fellow crewmates in a manner that indicates how much they value it. Participant K describes interaction on board as follows:

> *I'm quite open to talking to people. I suppose that's probably the biggest one, is it? You know, someone who can generally approach on board that like you're able to talk to.*

Participant K believes that being open to talking to people is the "*biggest*" or most important component of the mentally healthy seafarer. Participant F explains the significance of interaction on board for him:

> *So dinnertime is the only time that you see everyone when you can...everything and that I think it's the whole… you know the*

> *teamwork – everyone coming together, a good meal to you know, bring up the morale.*

The importance of good food on board has already been discussed in the preceding section of this chapter, with the advantages of a good meal described by participants. It seems that a good meal has another advantage – it helps the crew to come together and interact. Participant F connects crew interaction to the concepts of teamwork and morale. Participant A and Participant E both found that interaction with their crewmates alleviated the stress that came with an extended trip at sea. Participant A explains:

> *So we all around the same age and we all actually got on really, really well. So it made a lot a bigger difference for us that I think that's how I coped with the five months away was the engineering team was really good. We had a lot of laughs together, we really got on.*

Participant A goes on to say that this interaction had a significant, positive impact on his experience of stress on board:

> *Because there was a lot of stressful stuff that happened with the contract, with the machinery. So the fact that we could kind of unwind with each other made a very, very big difference.*

Participant K explains how fortunate he feels working with a close-knit crew, and these relationships seem to extend outside of work as well.

> *I think it just may be the vessel I am on because I've worked on other vessels, where it's a very different atmosphere. I think we're quite fortunate that we're quite a close-knit bunch. We're quite close. We talk to each other quite often on like, the crew, WhatsApp outside of work? We're quite a close-knit bunch. When I sail like covering other people, they've definitely been a lot less open to conversation.*

Participant H and Participant L value interaction on board to the extent that they believe social media and TV on board have played a negative role. Participant H explains that she disagrees with the opinion that crews should be equipped with better Internet access, because of the role increased Internet access is causing on crew interaction:

> *They're not communicating then as a team. So on our particular vessels, they each have their own cabin. And most of them are en-suite. And most of them have their own satellite box inside. So they then end up at the end of their working day, they will go to their cabins and close the door. So if you're one of these people that struggling and you really want somebody to talk to, you can walk around the entire ship when you're off duty. And apart from whoever's on duty on the bridge and who is on duty in the engine room, every other door will be closed.*

Participant L goes on to say something similar about this issue:

> *Participant L: I have seen the contrast of the introduction of the Internet onboard. It's destroyed the social life.*
> *Researcher: How do you mean?*
> *Participant L: Well mostly in the evenings, after work is done, most people kind of just go to their cabins close their doors and play on their phones and laptops in the evening.*

In Participant L and Participant H's opinion, the introduction of TV and Internet on board had a negative impact on crew interaction, resulting in crew members retiring to their rooms after a shift.

Ironically, and perhaps highlighting how important it is for seafarers to value interaction on board, Participant J and Participant C describe situations where seafarers who were battling with stress on board became increasingly isolated. Participant J's story is personal. He describes a particularly stressful time on board when he picked up smoking and had very little interaction with others:

> *I remember, way back in 2015, I picked up smoking on board. Nobody to talk to, the Internet was not decent….so I was doing my work. But I would be back in my cabin I would do pretty much anything. I would watch a movie.*

Participant C describes a situation where his crewmate discovered on board that his wife was having an affair. Like Participant J, his reaction was to isolate himself and pick up smoking.

> *So he kind of locked up in the cabin, you try and talk to the guy, if you can, he was smoking. So I think he went through quite a lot more boxes of cigarettes, then one, then he would normally during that time. Also kind of didn't really eat much as well just kind of you can see he just took a - which is understandable – took a big stress on him.*

Another form of social interaction is the important role many of the participants describe playing in the lives of other seafarers. They intentionally share their time, expertise, advice and compassion, acting as mentors, often to younger or more inexperienced crewmates. Participant L explains:

> *If I notice somebody is a bit off-colour. I do something about it. I try and approach them, engage. I was actively engaged with my guys and stuff on board. You know are you married, do you have kids, do you have pets. And slowly the stuff starts coming out. But over the 15 years, I have never had nothing serious happen to them.*

Participant L benefits from her intentional behaviour by having a goal. She is aware of how her crew are feeling and supporting them is part of her role at sea. Likewise for Participant J, who describes his experience with a young seafarer who had heard news of a crisis at home. He explains how he helped this young man, who asked him if he could talk to him daily for two minutes just to check in:

> *So he asks me sir, Is it possible that I can call you every day for two minutes, because I don't have anyone and he is alone, and is the chief engineer alone on the ship. So he can't even go ashore, because the ship is in such a place where he can be kicked out again. So he has to, or no, there is no power, nothing on the ship. Worse than being in prison. I said, "Why two minutes? You can take five minutes, take 10 minutes, everyday you call me. Whenever you want to, you feel down, you call me. And even if I am on some other call, I'll disconnect and I will take your calls. For me, you are important.*

This reaching out to others benefits the participants themselves. Participant J describes how he values the fact that his crew comes to him with their problems. He enjoys the fact that they are comfortable enough with him to come to him with personal issues, and notes that there are others on board who are not as sensitive to these issues as he is:

> *For instance, I have no training talking about mental health with my juniors. But they have felt comfortable coming to me. Coming to me and talking about family problems, that my crew has that level of comfort, that they trust me with things. I couldn't help them all, but they talk to me anyway. Thinking of some of the people, I sail with, if I was going through something. I would not go to them. Because I know they would say things like, "you deal with it, that's your problem". Things like that. They are very insensitive to these things.*

For Participant E, being able to talk to his crewmates about his faith and theirs lifted his mood when he should have felt depressed:

> *I work with them. I eat with them. I see them in a passage. And how even they in their own journey ask me questions. What about this? What about that? How does this work? So for me, that was really a period of time that was supposed to make me depressed, actually lifted me up.*

Other participants discuss how receiving some kind of mentorship or support is helpful to them. Participant K explains:

> *Because you're generally surrounded by people who are generally got a bit more experience. Okay. They sort of chip in and know what to do. Sometimes you just unload your stressors to someone whose got a lot more experience in you.*

Participant K here notes that he is able to "unload" his stress on someone who is more experienced than he is. The word *unload* could indicate that his stress is a heavy burden for him to carry, and having someone to unload it onto, who can help him bear the burden and who knows more than he does, helps him. Participant I also refers to her support system on the ship, and explains how it can make a significant difference to one's time at sea:

> *And like I said it all depends on your support system on the ship. Whether the people that you're working with, whether they are helpful, whether they are supportive, constructive, disciplinary-actioned, or*

correction, all of those little things makes a big difference on how you take your contract.

Participant D explains how mentoring is something that used to be a part of ship life years ago:

There used to be more of a sea dad or sea mum that you have, you know a buddy routine. Somebody that's got your back, somebody that was back in the day then was allocated. So it might be the third officer. And they say, Well, you've got two new cadets joining or something, your responsibility is to make sure that you interact with them, irrespective of the watches at least twice a day, make sure they're okay make sure they got what they want, if they've got things that is adding pressure to their lives, or they're not sure about the job, make sure you clear that all up. And that was how it was done.

Participant D refers to a sea mum or a sea dad – these terms illustrate the protective role that mentors used to play in the lives of seafarers. Participant D goes on to explain why this is no longer a common practice:

Unfortunately, in the last decade or so it's been more money driven, time driven, schedule driven, and a great shame to the maritime industry. It's not been people driven.

He explains how it is a "great shame" that this practice is no longer common on ships. His description here indicates a sense of regret and disappointment that seafarers are no longer assigned sea mums or sea dads. Participant J echoes him in his comment:

People have no time for people. This is one thing. Even on the ship. This is the problem.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, seeing the value of social interaction on board seems to be an important component of well-being. These participants see the value in it and thus ensure it forms part of their time at sea, acting as a buffer against occupational stress. In addition to this, being a mentor and being mentored by someone seem to be very helpful in ensuring seafarers experience a sense of well-being on board. It seems to provide a sense of purpose and can make a trip at sea, away from home, more bearable.

7.4.7 Sub-theme C6: *Even if things aren't good, you learn to make a joke of it*

Banter on board is a form of interaction that is highly valued. Banter includes friendly and playful teasing remarks, and is noted by Participant E as a way of showing affection on board:

> *If you banter now with someone is almost shows you almost as a sign of showing affection in a way. It's almost like I'm caring now. Which is the industry thing of like, just taking each other out and making comments and you know.*

Participant E believes that banter on board means that someone cares about you, and he notes this is part of the industry. Participant G's description of banter shows the role it plays in getting her through long trips away:

> *You have to have it [banter] because if you don't your week, your month, your four months is just gonna drag. And you're gonna start resenting the job that you love. And I like to have a laugh with people.*

Participant G goes on to explain the banter she has with her male crewmates in particular:

> *I do like to have a laugh with the boys. I always stand by the fact that if you can make the boys laugh...they'll always have your back...and I think that's where I stand out from other female officers.*

Her description here of making the boys laugh shows that she intentionally engages in this form of interaction with her colleagues, with the benefit of fitting into the male-dominated social environment. It becomes a strategy she uses to elicit their support and access the group. Participant L on the other hand, speaks very differently about banter in her comment here about mentoring female cadets that are less experienced than she is:

> *So, if they have like, questions about I don't know, what to take on board the boat, or if there's a situation that they're not getting on with somebody on board the boat, or, you know, are they being harassed? Or is it just banter, or they're not sure? You know, it's very, it's very informal, it's very fluid.*

While banter is useful for one female participant, it seems that some female seafarers have to decide whether they are being sexually harassed or whether they are merely the victims of good-natured banter. Apart from having to make a call on this, some of them appear to be in need of mentoring to deal with this issue. This is problematic as it places female seafarers in the difficult situation of whether they should or should not report what they experience as sexual harassment as it may be explained away as banter. Considering the fact that sexual harassment is already notoriously under-reported across all industries and sectors, this is a significant concern. It is also noted that banter and the line it may cross into offensive comments could also impact other minority groups on board, and not just female seafarers. Banter as it pertains to different cultural groups, for example, might be difficult for someone from a different cultural group to navigate.

Humour was also cited as a significant factor in managing difficult situations on board. It is what helped Participant A through a particularly rough time. He describes a time where he had no contact at all with his family for four weeks when he was sailing from Singapore to India. The humour on board is what helped him to get through the difficult situation:

> *And we just kept each other going like, you can't take it too seriously. Even if things aren't good, you learn to make a joke of it. Maybe have quite a dark sense of humour sometimes*.

Participant I also noted the importance of humour and its ability to alleviate tension on board:

> *And sometimes that's because you want to help people, but you also support them by being a little bit more – when you are bringing in a little bit of humour in a situation, it brings down the tension.*

Participant C explains that problems do not seem as big after a good chuckle with the crew.

> *Kind of just have a laugh. Like the amount of times as well that you laugh with tears running on your eyes, because it is just everyone having a nice time of just chatting and relaxing and before you know it, it's like an hour later... But it is one of these things where you just know whatever trouble or problem you had doesn't seem as big anymore.*

In conclusion to this sub-theme, it seems that banter serves a function at sea. It is a part of socialising; it conveys the culture of the maritime industry in that it is seen as a sign of affection between seafarers; it also seems to provide one of the female seafarers as a means to manage being one of the only female seafarers on board and access the male-dominated social environment. However, banter does seem to have its cons for female seafarers, and possibly others, who are unsure of whether banter verges on harassment or offensive comments. Banter could blur the line between support and harassment. This may, at times, end up enabling sexual harassment and other forms of bullying.

7.4.8 Conclusion

This small group of participants with high levels of well-being appear to benefit from specific skills that support them in managing stress, including a positive attitude towards their work and finding meaning and purpose in their roles. They also appear to engage in acceptance of situations in which they find themselves, and value and prioritise interaction with their crewmates. They see the meaning behind banter, and therefore appreciate it and engage in it. Some of the female participants use banter as a means to access the male-dominated social environment on board, yet it also appears to present a problem for some female seafarers, who might have to endure sexual harassment disguised as banter. Some participants also appear to value both mentoring, and being a mentor, on board. These are skills that some of these participants have learned over time. The significance for the industry is that these skills could be taught to other seafarers.

7.5 GET D: Lived experiences of mental health

7.5.1 Introduction

This Group Experiential theme focuses on participants' responses to the qualitative question on mental health, which is: *what are your experiences of mental health on board*? Participant responses converged into two sub-themes; firstly, that many participants shared experiences of mental health that seem to indicate a deficit-based perspective of mental health and secondly, that interventions on mental health have not had a significant impact on this group of participants. These two sub-themes could point to some of the stigma around mental health in the industry.

7.5.2 Sub-theme D1: *We can cope; we don't need mental health*

Mental health is a broad concept that encompasses the psychological and emotional well-being of an individual, and practices that relate to that. An individual can have good mental

health or poor mental health. Yet some of the participants noted that if someone has mental health (which, of course, we all have) they have mental health difficulties. For example, Participant C links the general concept of mental health with mental instability:

> *Participant C: We'll deal more with moods than I would say mental health as much.*
> *Researcher: What do you mean moods?*
> *Participant C: If it's a bad mood, if it's kind of you'll deal more with a bad mood than if you'll deal with someone who's actually mentally unstable. Or you will deal with someone who's got a lot of anger issues. So you deal with an angry mood, I'd say quite often.*

It appears that Participant C views mental health and a bad mood as two separate issues and he connects mental health (a neutral term) to mental instability (a term with the connotation of erratic or unpredictable behaviour). Likewise, Participant G links mental health to erratic behaviour, although unlike Participant C, this participant has received workplace mental health training:

> *In my personal opinion, because if no one said the word stigma, and I got a stigma, everyone knows that, you know, like, if someone's got mental health you know, if someone next door lives, you know who lives next door to you has mental health, you might have a preconceived thought of what they're like, maybe they're violent. Maybe there is that, maybe that, there is that stigma.*

As with Participant C, Participant G's connotation of mental health is not neutral. If someone "*has mental health*", they are mentally ill. Participant H explains how she experienced this misconception of mental health first hand on board:

> *So I tried to raise mental health awareness on board one of the boats, I was sailing, and the reaction was, "For goodness sake [Participant H], what, we don't need that. We can cope, we don't need mental health." And I said, "What do you think mental health is?" and they said, "Well, you know, that's when you're crazy, that's you know, you shouldn't be at sea if you have mental health issues".*

In this extract, the word "*crazy*" is used in reference to mental health. When used in this way, this word is often used to describe someone showing wild or even aggressive behaviour. It seems that for this small group of seafarers responding to Participant G, the term *mental healt*h indicates mental health difficulties that manifest in abnormal or disturbing behaviour. If this is the case, it is completely understandable that these seafarers ''*don't need mental health*'' onboard.

In keeping with this deficit-based perspective, some of the participants shared experiences of mental health difficulties onboard that are associated with insanity, incompetence or dangerous, unpredictable behaviour. Participant L, for example, shares the following:

> *Researcher: Could you maybe share some experiences of mental health issues on board?*
> *Participant L: Well, no one really comes out and says, you know, I think I am skitzo; how do you deal with it? I think I have something wrong upstairs. What would I do with that information?*

The term "skitzo" is a derogatory term often used to describe abnormal behaviour such as delusions, hallucinations, incoherent speech, or illogical thinking. These behaviours would certainly indicate that something is "*wrong upstairs*". This is so far removed from Participant L's experience of the world that she would not even know what to do with the information, and she ends the sentence with a rhetorical question, as if to lay emphasis to this point. Participant L then goes on to explain experiences that indicate that she has actually had exposure to mental health difficulties on board, such as social anxiety:

> *Some people have social anxiety. I see recklessness and stuff like that. But nothing serious. Just kind of riding their time and waiting to get home again and stuff again. They keep themselves busy, but I have never experienced anything, mental illness, serious like.*

Participant L mentions how she sees recklessness. This perhaps points to an assumption that there is a connection between poor mental health and some kind of erratic behaviour. While this might be the case, her comment could also point to an assumption that poor mental health is linked to unpredictable or incompetent behaviour at work. Participant A (who has not received mental health training) appears to have similar assumptions, evident in his response to a similar question:

Researcher: And do you know a seafarer who has struggled with their mental health?
Participant A: Yeah, when I was studying, there was another guy that studied the year before me, and he went to sea one year before me and he was, he was gay. Going into an environment of seafarers, which is predominantly male, trying to bring that into that environment is extremely difficult. He was very extroverted with his tendencies. So, they found him the one day standing on the railing on the back of the ship about to jump off. It got to that point.

This participant shares an anecdote that is a rather extreme example of someone clearly struggling with a homophobic environment that must have been incredibly stressful, as opposed to an anecdote of someone experiencing low mood or depressive symptoms such as excessive sleep or isolation. It could actually be argued that this crewmate's suicidal behaviour was not entirely abnormal, considering the intense discrimination he must have been facing from his colleagues with no way to escape this treatment. Participant E's response to the same question is similar, and he shares a story of a crewmate whose distress was very obvious in his behaviour:

Researcher: Do you maybe have any experiences of some battling with mental health on board?
Participant E: Yeah, one of, one of the ships that I joined, also I was one of the lower ranks. The guy, the second engineer completely lost his mind. And it gets, it gets quite crazy, but I think it's not it's not a joking matter about it, it's kind of like, he cracked, kind of that just got quite bad, he kind of locked himself in his cabin, closed it all up. They ran out of cigarettes also because of the time, that got longer he was a smoker and I think that together with maybe some other issues, just acted all together. He locked himself in his cabin kind of started breaking off the cupboards inside. And we basically had to break the door down to get inside and semi-restrain the guy before it gets any worse. And then they just like gets his emergency sign off. Like that's when it becomes a safety issue and kind of semi-lock him up, not lock him up, just kind of keep him in a bit more of a safer space until he was able to sign him off. So that's when it gets quite bad.

Participant E shares details that not only indicate severe emotional distress but also uncontrollable behaviour – the individual eventually had to be restrained. The word ‘‘cracked’’ also indicates the idea that the person was not in their right mind. Again, it is argued that this is a very extreme example of someone battling with distress. The context here is also significant. The priority seems to be to get the seafarer off the ship so that he does not put himself or others at risk. Participant F shares his story about mental illness on board:

> *Researcher: And in terms of mental health on board, have you ever experienced anyone with a mental health problem on board?*
> *Participant F: Not me but another guy I sailed with. He told me. It was one of the N class vessels and a cadet disappeared – South African cadet. We never heard whether she jumped over the side or whether she was pushed. She disappeared.*
> *Researcher: Pushed?*
> *Participant F: Yeah, whether she was pushed overboard. We were not too sure what happened. Yeah. But when I spoke to the captain, because I sailed with him. And he said the cadet that he was sent was still a little baby. She came from the middle of South Africa. She had been told that it was this glamorous life that she was going to be leading and she’s going to be running in that. And when he went into his cabin, he said, there on her cabin on the bedside table was a Bible, which obviously read and everything, and a teddy bear. He said she, she wasn’t ready. He doesn’t think to come to sea. And rumour has it, it’s obviously not confirmed. And rumour has it that the chief officer and her had some sexual relations and things like that. She fell pregnant. He was married. And she didn’t know how to deal with it. So, she jumped because she obviously didn’t want to tell her parents and things like this. Or maybe the chief officer pushed her. It was too much emotion. There’s no one to talk and no one, no one to open up to.*
> *Me: Wow, wow that’s a terrible story.*
> *Participant F: It’s the I mean, you at sea, frustrated. And I mean, there’s been chief officers that have been stabbed, there have been guys hit with planks over the head and stuff like this. You’re out there. There’s no one else out there.*

While Participant F’s story was not a personal experience but a story he heard from a friend, it is significant when considered alongside the experiences described by Participant E and

Participant A. All three of these participants responded to the question about mental health difficulties on board by sharing experiences of crewmates who showed unpredictable, extreme and even dangerous behaviour, which appears to be the manifestation of significant emotional distress. The connotation of insanity is also included. Perhaps even more concerning is Participant F's ominous comment that ''there's no one else out there''. At sea, people are left unattended, beyond the protection of police, social services or mental health professionals.

In sum, this section highlights two things. First, three of the participants describe experiences that indicate that their understanding of mental health, or the understanding of those around them, is deficit-based. In other words, if someone has mental health, they are mentally ill. This is problematic as it could indicate that these seafarers do not realise that mental health is a naturally occurring aspect to all human beings, just like physical health. If this is the case for other seafarers, it could pose a significant barrier to the effective implementation of any work-based interventions on mental health. This is because, for these seafarers at least, they do not consider mental health even as something relevant to them. Second, this section highlights that some of the participants appear to link mental health difficulties with erratic or unpredictable behaviour. Again, this is problematic because if this is the case with other seafarers, it could point to considerable stigma in the industry regarding any kind of mental health illness.

7.5.3 Sub-theme D2: *It gets lip service*

Only three of the participants have received any kind of mental health intervention or training. Participant C and Participant E describe being unsure about whether or not they have been exposed to any kind of intervention at all. It seems that their experiences with mental health interventions were not very significant or memorable. Participant C explains:

> *Participant C: On the onboard computer, electronic training modules that we have, I think there's a few on mental health. I think I might have done them, I'm not sure.*

Likewise, Participant E, who has been in the same company since his studies as a cadet, does not seem to have been impacted by the interventions offered by the company:

> *Participant E: I have been with the same company since my studies. With the company, I have not. The only thing that they brought in, maybe in the last year and a half was like an online training thing that you do on the ships. But it's not really, there's some modules a lot with*

> *like work-related things and work stuff. And then there's a few modules on mental health and just giving you like an idea or no idea even, just a something about mental disease or something, you know' and that's it.*
> *Researcher: Yeah ok. Have you done any of the modules?*
> *Participant E: I probably did, yeah.*

Neither Participant C nor Participant E appear very impacted by any interventions they may have come across – they can't even recall doing them. However, Participant E does note that there was something that was memorable for him:

> *So, one of our marine managers, he started this year to write some letters, and send and distribute it out to the fleet. For like mental health and support stuff. And I think he or he was a seafarer. Then he went and studied psychology, and he ended up doing marriage counselling. So, the the way he wrote his letters, that I could see the response of the people on board. They think it's nonsense, think it's a waste of time. It's meaningless. I've enjoyed the letters. It's really nice. Nice to read. So, I enjoyed it. But a lot of people don't.*

Participant E describes letters that he enjoyed reading. Although it can also be argued that his description of these letters being ''*nice*'' does not convey the sense that they were particularly impactful. The word *nice* usually denotes something that is pleasant, but not necessarily powerful or very effective. It is speculated that this intervention did not have much of an impact on Participant E. Perhaps more than this is that Participant E suggests the social norm onboard is one that is dismissive of this sort of acknowledgement of the mental health challenges of the industry. Participant C goes on to describe how lip service is paid to mental health, in that support for mental health is expressed but it is insincere, with no one taking any significant action:

> *It kind of it gets lip service. It'll be mentioned – it will be at the thing like, if you have any problems, speak to your buddy, you can speak to the captain.*

Participant A also describes mental health interventions using the same word:

Participant A: I think there's a lot of lip service paid towards it. The companies they have the paperwork, because it looks good, and they need to do it.
Researcher: But that's not what you are seeing?
Participant A: Not in my experience, I think if you said to a company that you were depressed that you need some time off, they may not be so sympathetic towards it.

Participant A confirms here that he has not experienced the kind of support that shipping companies seem to advocate. He believes that companies do this because it looks impressive. It may be that some seafarers see the supposed concern for mental health as being more for marketing purposes than a genuine concern for the welfare of seafarers. Participant I reiterates this in her description of what she has seen from companies in the industry:

I think companies are starting to produce okay policies. And I think some people are - lots of companies, who are "Oh, look, we've produced a course" or "Oh, look, we've got this poster". And what have you, which is great. But like I said, I do think that more companies should get several people from a ship from a rig, whatever, on through the [mental health] *first aider course.*

Participant B has not experienced anything being done on a practical level to help, for instance, seafarers who are stuck at sea. In fact, he experiences any kind of mention about mental health as empty words:

I think the unions will come out with some statements and some videos and things and some publicity and it's a lot of empty words most of the time. Because I mean, great example now is with the pandemic. There's crew that have, they have long contracts anyway, maybe 8, 9, 10 months. And they're stuck on board, their contracts finished.

Participant G appears to feel the same way in her description of various mental health interventions she has come across in her career. She is one of the three participants who has attended a mental health intervention. She feels that generic information is used by the industry and thus fails to have an impact as it is not specific or relevant to seafarers:

So, it's just like well you've taken somewhere, the origin of this text, which you've all got, which I now have, and then you've made it kind of seafarer specific. So, I haven't seen the fruits of all the like the labour of you know.

Participant L uses another word to describe how she experienced these interventions:

Not that I am aware they focus on it. We have got some … We have got some in house training that we do. Like specific computer courses and stuff that they do. But they are Mickey Mouse. They are not really focussed on anything serious. It's just like how to deal with it and blah blah blah. It's mainly if you feel like this try and get some exercise and watch your diet, it's really basic.

This term, *Mickey Mouse*, is often used to describe things that are too easy, small, ineffective, or unimportant to be taken seriously, and this is how Participant L communicates she feels about the mental health interventions in the industry. The fact that mental health interventions are experienced as mere lip service on behalf of shipping companies potentially creates a problem. It has seemed to create the perception in these participants that shipping companies are aware of the issue of seafarer mental health, but their efforts at confronting these issues are not appreciated or viewed as sincere by their employees.

There also appears to be quite a reluctance to use the resources that are available, such as counselling helplines. They do not seem to be experienced as helpful or useful. Participant A describes his experience:

Researcher: So, do you maybe have experiences of any kind, any helplines?
Andy: So there are yeah, there are some of them. And one of the boats I was on where we had the phone box and you had to buy the phone cards, there was poster to stuck up next to the phone with the latest one posted there. So, it had all the numbers that you could call if you wanted to talk to somebody.
Researcher: Have you used something like that?
Participant A: No, because communication on board is so much better. And it's easier to reach out to family or friends now. Okay, but

maybe not everyone has that option or not everyone feels that they can do that.

Participant L also describes how she would much rather reach out to someone at home, using an online platform, and that having Internet on board has resulted in her getting the support she needs from home:

Do I need a hotline? Not really. Mainly because we have a good…. I mean we have got Internet onboard. So, I am constantly chatting to my boyfriend at home and I have got contact with my family and friends via Whatsapp. So, you have constantly got that to reach out to reality.

Participant K argues that there are people who do use these helplines, but they do not share this information with others:

Some people won't admit that they've used it. That might be going back to that taboo subject of talking about it. But yeah, I don't know anyone who has admitted it.

The word "*admit"* is an interesting choice. It indicates an unwillingness to offer the information in the first place. In Participant K's opinion, seafarers are reluctant to share with others that they seek help, and this highlights the idea that the issue of mental health in the industry is taboo. This idea of it being taboo might result in a stigmatised view of mental health interventions in the first place, to the extent that some seafarers are not giving these interventions a chance because of this stigma.

Participant D is the only participant who has had formal mental aid first training. He describes this experience with formal training in mental health helped him to realise that mental health is not about something being wrong with an individual:

Yeah, so I, I did the level three supervision, First aid for Mental Health. So that's a formally recognised qualification. Obviously, it's a course so you do the course. And there's an exam at the end. So, it wasn't just an attendance course. But it gives you a deeper understanding about the effects of mental health in certain situations. But it also teaches you how to break down barriers and to use the simple words like mental health where people go "Oh, there is something wrong with

you." Then you're obviously diagnosed and have some disease. Whereas in fact, we all have mental health, whether it be good, or bad and all those shades of emotions in between.

In conclusion to this sub-theme, it seems that mental health interventions are not having the desired impact, and potentially creating a scenario where seafarers feel even more unheard and unassisted as these interventions are viewed as mere lip service paid by an organisation or company to check a box that it has been done. From the experiences of these seafarers, the industry's claimed concern about the wellbeing of seafarers does not match the actual behaviour of the industry. The likely consequence of this is that if interventions are seen as being insincere, participants are less likely to take them seriously. That being said, a more formal mental health intervention, such as mental health first aid training, does seem to have had an impact on one of the participants.

7.5.4 Conclusion

This GET is based on participant responses regarding their experiences of mental health and mental health interventions. It seems the concept of mental health is viewed by the majority of the participants from a deficit-based perspective, where the word is associated with mental illness. It seems that this is independent of whether or not the participants have attended workplace training on mental health, which does not seem to be valued by those who have. Support resources such as counselling helplines have not been used by these participants. In addition, it seems that the stigma around mental health difficulties might be standing as a barrier to some seafarers being open to these initiatives in the first place.

7.6 Conclusion to chapter

This chapter has discussed the findings that pertain to the research questions. Several GETs and sub-themes were identified and described. From the data collected, it seems that the participants experience life across two worlds – home and sea – and this experience potentially has a profound impact on the participants' sense of self. This is an experience that seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB appear able to manage, yet the question of how this plays out in other seafarers, and the proper management amongst seafarers with poor mental health, remains. This is a finding that has not been the subject of previous research and certainly warrants further investigation.

In addition to this, various potential occupational stressors have been identified using the words and descriptions of the participants. It is noteworthy that some of these, such as food

and lack of recognition, could be addressed fairly simply by shipping companies who are spending considerable amounts of time and money on mental health interventions. Also in this chapter, the participants described experiences that potentially shed further light on exactly how they experience their reportedly high levels of well-being. Skills and practices such as acceptance and having meaning were discussed.

Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of how mental health is viewed by seafarers with reportedly high levels of PWB, and important findings regarding the deficit-based perspective on mental health as well as how mental health interventions are viewed by the participants were discussed. The next chapter will go on to discuss the significance of these findings, and how they fit within the context of previous research as discussed in the literature review. Implications that may be valuable for use by stakeholders in the maritime industry will also be suggested.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

I went down to supper…after sitting a long time listening to the long stories of some sailors who had just come from a plum-pudding voyage.
Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 122)*

8.1 Introduction to chapter

The goal of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of a group of seafarers with reportedly high levels of psychological well-being. This chapter meets this goal by describing the world of these participants and how they make sense of their world, especially as it pertains to mental health and well-being. In doing so, this research deepens the understanding of a great deal of the quantitative research on seafarers, as well as adding to the qualitative research in the field.

The chapter starts by discussing the major findings as related to the broad research question as well as the three, more specific research sub-questions and literature already presented on seafarer well-being and occupational stress. This chapter also describes what implications may be valuable for use by stakeholders in the maritime industry, especially seafarers themselves. The findings support existing literature and also offer new insights regarding seafarers' experiences living on board, their well-being and how they experience occupational stress and mental health. As recommended by IPA researchers, new literature in addition to that explored in the literature review of this thesis, may be used to interpret the findings (Smith et al., 2009). New literature is therefore introduced in this chapter for this purpose.

8.2 Broad research question

8.2.1 Introduction

What are the lived experiences of a group of seafarers (who report high levels of PWB)?
This section answers this broad research question by providing an analysis of twelve seafarers' experiences of living and working at sea for months at a time, and the impact that this appears to have on them.

8.2.2 Work-life boundaries

The current study indicates that for many of the participants, the ship presents a complex blend of work and home. This is a unique finding that has not appeared in previous research on seafarer occupational health. Although it is fairly obvious that ship life and home life become one for seafarers at sea, the significance of this finding is how the participants described and

made sense of their experiences of this. This information might inform the development of new ideas and theories regarding the mental health and well-being of this population, as well as identify potential avenues for further research and exploration.

Working at home has been the topic of a great deal of research in other industries, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced many people to abandon office work for remote work at home. Pre-COVID research on the issue with regards to the general workforce advocates for work-life boundary management, which is defined as the approach that one uses to demarcate home and work life (Kossek, 2016). Previous research has proven that the effective management thereof can reduce burnout, stress, mood disorders and life conflict (Kossek, 2016). A key factor to boundary management is boundary control, defined as the perceived level of control an individual has in managing the boundaries between work and personal life (Kossek, 2016) and it is this degree of perceived control that has been shown to play a pivotal role in boundary management (Cho, 2020). These studies are useful in suggesting various factors (such as boundary control) on which seafarers could focus to manage the complexities of the blend of home and work; however, it is argued that far more research is needed into the issue of boundary management while one lives at work, which is arguably different from working at home. This difference is evident in how the participants described making sense of living at work. For example, one of the strategies described is assimilating into the environment on board by becoming part of the crew. This is certainly not a strategy that is adopted by those who work at home. Considering Kossek's (2016) research into the role of stress in work-life boundary management and boundary control, this issue as it pertains to seafarers certainly warrants further investigation.

8.2.3 Identity

This confusing blend of work and home seems to impact on the identity of many of the participants, a finding that has not, to my knowledge, appeared in research regarding seafarers. The phenomenological nature of this research allowed for this finding to come to light through the voices of the participants themselves. This is a significant finding since employee identities in work organisations are hailed as being key to explaining almost everything that happens in an organisation (Brown, 2014). This is because the kinds of identities that people create for themselves at work have consequences for their daily decision-making (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Past research has focused on the identity work associated with people in other areas of work, such as priests (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006), police (Tracey, 2004) and lawyers (Brown & Lewis, 2011). It is argued that my research now adds seafarers to this group.

Identity refers to the meanings that individuals attach to themselves in various settings as they answer questions such as: ‘‘*How do I relate to others?”* and ‘‘*Who am I?*’’ (Baumeister, 1986). Identity at work simply refers to the meanings that individuals attach to themselves at work. Many of the participants made sense of the transient nature of their careers by having different identities related to the role in which they found themselves, whether at work as a seafarer, or at home as a spouse, partner, father/mother or son/daughter. This is consistent with common theories of identity; psychologists have long accepted that individuals have multiple identities across various settings such as home and work. Mead (1934) was one of the first psychologists to suggest that there exists a “world of selves” in every individual (p. 352). Far more recent research substantiates this finding, noting that when it comes to identity, individuals have a repertoire, with each identity becoming prominent in different contexts and roles (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). However, while multiple identities across a variety of contexts, and thus identity work, is considered normal for the typical individual, it is argued that these participants must engage in identity work to manage their different identities to a degree that is far more complex as they work and live in the same environment for months at a time.

Identity work is defined as the various activities in which individuals engage in “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising” their self-identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). Identity work is expected to occur when there is confusion or conflict around roles (Stets & Serpe, 2013) and happens when someone needs to modify their identity to be accepted, listened to, or simply fit in. Forms of identity work were described by many of the participants. For example, some of the participants described being able to slip out of the roles they play while at home, feeling a sense of freedom and authenticity when doing so, yet they are prevented from living authentically on board as they must put up a professional and friendly front. This is in line with Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) who found that when discrepancies arise between role obligation at work and the authentic self, employees may engage in identity work to mitigate inconsistencies or even to suppress personal values, such as the value of being honest and true to oneself. Another participant described the paradox of being able to be himself on board only to arrive home and need a few days to get back into being himself. Yet another participant described shedding her identity as mother while at sea, but then referred to herself in the third person as a *mummy* missed by her children while at sea. It seems here that these participants may engage in continual identity work to reduce or manage the confusion they feel between living at home onboard and living at home on shore.

Unfortunately, and potentially significant for some seafarers, research has found that while the aim of identity work is to reduce a sense of ambiguity around one’s identity, there is no

guarantee that identity work will successfully do this. In fact, it can create new issues, and it is noted that this is the reason this finding is so significant as it has brought to light a potentially deeper issue that may be impacting other seafarers, and not just the participants. One of the issues that unsuccessful identify work has been found to create is a sense of ambiguity. Beech (2011) cautioned that despite efforts at identity work, a sense of ambiguity may persist, leaving the individual in a liminal or transient state (Beech, 2011). Taking this into consideration, the potential interference of identity work cannot be ruled out when it comes to the mental health of these participants, and potentially other seafarers.

A second issue that unsuccessful identity work has been proven to create is identity confusion. Erikson (1968) wrote extensively about identity, arguing that while identity formation occurs between the ages of 12 and 18, an individual's identity shifts and changes throughout life. According to Erikson, developing a synthesised sense of self is one of the most important developmental tasks in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Potentially significant to seafarers, Erikson went on to coin the term identity confusion (Erikson, 1968) which he defined as "a split of self-images, a loss of centre and a dispersion" (p. 212) and believed that identity confusion could occur at any age. Identity confusion is problematic. A confused sense of identity has been associated with a range of poor outcomes, such as depression and anxiety (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang & Olthuis, 2009) and externalising behaviour such as sexual risk taking and illicit drug use (Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan & Szapocznik, 2005). Other researchers have postulated that identity work that is not properly managed can result in confusion, which could result in a sense of self-alienation (Costas & Fleming, 2009) or even a damaged self-identity (Cowen & Hodgson, 2015). On the other hand, a synthesised sense of identity has been associated with lower degrees of externalising and internalising behaviour (Schwartz, 2007) as well as positive social relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick 2006) and a positive self-image (Luyckx, Goossens & Soenens, 2006). It is tentatively suggested that this may be a stressor that is playing a role in the poor mental health of some seafarers and further research is needed to clarify this.

A third reason that identity work amongst seafarers is in need of further research is that identity work in the workplace has been found to be more frequent, intense, and even necessary during situations where workplace stressors are particularly prevalent, as situations like this often prompt feelings of contradiction, confusion and doubt, which in turn lead to introspection and self-examination (Brown, 2014). For example, research on stigma management (stigma regarding mental health being an occupational stressor proven to exist for seafarers) has revealed that forms of identity work are used such as feigning normalcy, managing information disclosure, and withdrawing from society (Goffman, 1963).

8.2.4 Derealisation

Some of the participants described a feeling of derealisation on returning to shore, likening the experience to living in a fantasy world or being in a movie. This experience is commonly referred to as derealisation, an experience in which the external environment appears to be unfamiliar, with other people appearing as actors and the world a stage (Hunter, Sierra & David, 2003). Researchers note that experiences of derealisation normally occur on a continuum, with healthy people reporting experiences that last only a few moments (Hunter et al., 2003). Since seafarers spend months away from any sense of normality that is experienced on shore, these descriptions of undergoing a period of derealisation on return are understandable. The world to which these participants return is familiar but new at the same time and as noted by Lamvick (2012) ‘‘a ship is, in short, an extreme and an abnormal place to be: it is almost impossible to find a corresponding society elsewhere’’ (p. 25). However, the role that stress could play in this experience of derealisation is also worth considering.

Research has found that there is a strong association of symptoms of derealisation starting at the onset of a period of stress. For example, in a very recent study that investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological well-being of UK healthcare workers, a concerning number of participants reported symptoms of severe psychological distress, such as depersonalisation, derealisation and suicidal thoughts (Majumder, Jeve & Sales, 2021). In this study of 533 frontline health care workers, 68% reported experiencing sensations of either depersonalisation or derealisation, or a combination of both. The link that derealisation has with stress has led to the understanding that derealisation could act as a coping mechanism during times of stress. The symptoms of derealisation protect the individual from overwhelming anxiety by creating a detachment and sense of numbing from what is going on (Hunter, Charlon & David, 2017). If this is the case for some seafarers who return home, and certainly it seems to be for the participants who described this experience, then this necessary period of adjustment to radical change could be a considerable time of stress. The fact that many of the participants describe returning home as the happiest time, it is also wondered how other seafarers make sense of this dynamic between experiencing feelings of great happiness but also great stress. Further research on this is certainly needed to understand this potential phenomenon.

8.2.5 Conclusion

The current study’s results regarding work-life boundaries, identity and derealisation are significant in at least four major respects: first, the findings have brought to light experiences that have not appeared in previous research. The participants’ descriptions of how stressful

these experiences can be could illuminate more specific findings on seafarer mental health. Second, it is tentatively suggested that some seafarers may not have effective identity management strategies or have developed a coherent sense of identity in the first place, possibly leaving them at risk for identity confusion or identity ambiguity on top of the stressors already faced at sea. This is hugely significant for maritime students and cadets, most of them being at a vulnerable and pivotal point in their process of identity development as young adults and about to embark upon a career that could have a profound impact on this process. This is also particularly significant for South African maritime students, who are already vulnerable in the face of unique stressors that other seafarers do not face, such as a lack of training berths (Ghosh & Ruggunan, 2015). Third, these results match those observed in earlier studies regarding female seafarers. As noted in the literature review, Suter et al. (2006) found that the women in their study maintained and reproduced atypical gender identities while at service to assimilate into a masculine culture and found it difficult to adjust and revert to their pre-service identities when they returned home. Fourth, the period of returning home might well be a considerable time of stress for some seafarers. This finding could potentially challenge normative assumptions that homecoming is a happy time. There is certainly room for further progress in determining the role that identity and boundary management plays in the life of a seafarer.

8.3 Research sub-question 1

8.3.1 Introduction

This section answers the following research sub-question:
How is occupational stress experienced by a group of seafarers (who report high levels of PWB)?

It has already been proven that seafarers experience significant occupational stress. For example, a study that was mentioned in the literature review found that the working environment for seafarers was identified as the main factor causing mental health problems (Lefcowitz and Slade, 2019). Of the total sample in their study of 1 572 participants, 17% were defined as seafarers with generalised anxiety and 20% reported suicidal ideation (Lefcowitz & Slade, 2019). The results of my study shed light on these quantitative findings, explaining and expanding upon statistics like these. The need to consider the opinions of seafarers themselves with regards to occupational stressors, which was also emphasised in the literature review, is addressed in this section.

8.3.2 Food

Poor quality food was identified by many of the participants as a significant stressor on board, and although it has been addressed in previous research, this has been in the form of recommendations by stakeholders to improve life on board, as noted in the literature review. For example, Sampson and Ellis (2019) used questionnaire and interview data collected from seafarers to identify several strategies that they use to combat depression including recreational activities and interactional activities along with good quality food. However, exactly how seafarers experience food on board, and also how they make sense of these experiences and the meaning food on board has for seafarers, has not been discussed in previous research, again illustrating the significance of this study using a phenomenological methodology.

The participants experience food as one of the only things to look forward to on board. For some of them, it seems to break the monotony of life at sea. Lamvick (2012) argued that boredom and monotony are common experiences for seafarers at sea, and it was interesting to note that the participants of this study seem to use food and mealtimes as a way to mitigate boredom and monotony. Lamvick (2012) also argued that the ship is akin to a prison, and this is consistent with how the participants describe various situations where they were not able to do anything in the face of an undesirable meal. They wanted to eat differently but were unable to do so. The emotions that could arise from being trapped on board with limited choice could lead to increased levels of frustration and agitation. It is therefore wondered how much of a role unpalatable food plays in causing or exacerbating crew conflict. Furthermore, the participants' descriptions of food on board shed light on a study by Slišković and Penezić (2017) who noted that seafarers experience an unhealthier diet when at sea than at home. These researchers concluded that there is a direct correlation between being at sea and making poor life-style related choices. However, it is speculated that an unhealthy diet at sea may not necessarily be a lifestyle choice, as these researchers concluded, but an occupational hazard caused by choices around food and meal preparation made by shipping companies or ship owners that are not within the control of the crew.

Something else the participants mentioned was that food becomes a way to boost morale amongst the crew. This is in line with what has been found in other industries. Militaries around the world – the military being an industry that has already suggested in this thesis to be similar in many respects to the maritime industry – have realised that food could pose an occupational hazard and are working to provide good quality food that targets their troops' cognitive, emotional and physical condition (Moody, 2020). For example, the military in India, whose goal

it was to improve morale in its troops, argued that it was essential for its soldiers to be provided with nutritious, palatable food in order for this goal to be reached (Khanum et al., 2017). Another career that is similar in some ways to seafaring is space travel. Just like seafarers, astronauts are stuck for months aboard an enclosed environment with little to no choice regarding food. In this context, researchers have emphasised the importance of considering the psychological aspects of food on space explorers (Binsted, Kobrick, Griofa, Bishop & Lapierre, 2008). There has also been a focus on ensuring food for space explorers is able to build morale and enhance mission productivity, with this focus being even more important for longer missions into space (Obrist, Tu, Yao & Velasco, 2019). Taking the military and space into consideration, the present study's findings raise the possibility that the industry could significantly and very practically boost seafarer well-being and mental health by ensuring food is of a high quality, both in terms of ingredients and in how it is prepared.

It cannot be ignored that only male participants mentioned the issue of food on board. Of course, this was a small study and the fact that the four female participants did not mention the importance of food on board does not necessarily have significance. That being said, there are theories that exist regarding the relationship between masculinity and food. For example, researchers have found that red meat, with its bloody constitution and high protein content, has been proven to represent virility and physical strength in the context of masculinity (Adams, 1990; Fiddes, 1991; Rozin, Hormes, Faith & Wansink, 2012) and with this perspective in mind, it is interesting that two of the male participants specifically mentioned the importance of steak on board. The masculine culture which seems to dominate the shipping world was touched on in the literature review and has been the focus of research as it pertains to female seafarers, as well as the stigma regarding mental health. For this reason, food and masculinity warrants some discussion.

Research has found that men display their masculinities in a variety of ways when it comes to food. Interestingly, many of these ways were contrasted by the male participants in this study. Newcombe, McCarthy, Cronin and McCarthy (2012) found that, when it comes to food, men readily concede a large level of control and involvement to a nurturing other (generally their wives or partners) adopting a passive stance around food as well as the attitude that male involvement or input is taboo. The opposite was found in this study. For example, one participant was disgruntled because of the inadequate way the salmon was cooked, and the lack of control over food choice, variety and preparation was described as a source of stress on board. Of course, the cook is not necessarily viewed as a nurturing other, but a second finding makes this significant. Men typically downplay the hedonic consumption of food, adopting a more mechanistic approach to their diet (Roos, Prättälä & Koski, 2001). The

masculine ideal is to view eating as purely functional while more feminine aspects of food include those associated with taste and sensation, presentation, variety and health (Newcombe et al., 2012). In contrast to this masculine ideal, many of the male participants in this study discussed their dislike of poor tasting food and a lack of variety, stating a preference for things such as sushi, well-prepared fish, flavourful curries and vegetables. It is certainly more plausible that masculine discourses around food would exist in a masculine working environment such as the maritime industry. That being said, Holt and Thompson (2004) shed light on this finding. They note that men take advantage of competing masculine ideals to produce more pleasurable outcomes. In other words, it could be speculated that, since these male seafarers already adhere to typically masculine ideals by having a career that is male dominated, considered very adventurous, and requiring immense courage and physical strength, there is latitude for a more hedonic, typically feminine discourse around food. This could potentially emphasise the considerable degree to which the occupational culture of seafaring reflects typically masculine ideals, norms and values.

8.3.3 Lack of recognition

Lack of recognition is another significant stressor that was described by the participants. Lack of recognition has not been identified as an occupational stressor for seafarers in previous studies, making this finding significant. The participants described feeling unseen, unheard and unappreciated. Because seafarers sacrifice so much, especially time with family, it could be that this feeling of being unappreciated is felt more keenly. Very few people are aware of the sacrifices seafarers make, and these sacrifices are made so that people have access to anything from essential items such as food to luxury goods such as clothing and accessories. Appreciation at work is generally related to the recognition and evaluation one receives from others (Semmer, 2003) and this might explain why some of the participants feel unappreciated by a public who is not aware of what they do and thus do not recognise or value what they do.

Previous studies have found that lack of recognition at work can have a negative impact on mental health. Brun and Dugas (2006) note that a lack of recognition is one of the second-largest risk factors for psychological distress in the workplace. Recognition and appreciation at work are also associated with self-esteem (Stocker, Jacobshagen, Norbert, Semmer & Hubert, 2010). This finding is also significant as it corroborates the findings from a study conducted by Carotenuto et al. (2013) which was discussed in the literature review. The researchers found that the overall stress index amongst the sample of seafarers was low, with only 3% of the sample affected by severe stress, clearly in contrast to what other studies had found regarding seafarer stress levels. They explained these results by noting that all 162 seafarers were employed by the same shipping company. This finding, as well as the

experiences described by the participants in my study, potentially highlights the importance of shipping companies showing their employees appreciation and support. From a positive psychology perspective, increasing recognition could be a strategy to increase seafarer well-being. This is certainly the case in other research on the issue. For example, Abualrub and Al-Zaru (2008) found that recognition can act as a buffer against job-related stress. Another benefit of recognition at work is that, as noted, appreciation has also been known to boost self-esteem, and is therefore considered a powerful resource for work contexts (Brun & Dugas, 2008).

8.3.4 Delayed sign-off

The participants described delayed sign-off as being another significant stressor, and again this is one that has not been the subject of previous research. From the participants' descriptions, it seems that the sign-off date is extremely significant to them and reveals a potential coping mechanism that they use to manage the extended time away from home. A set date towards which the seafarer can work could very well make the isolation and time away easier to manage. The participants also described how delayed sign-off causes disruption to the process of preparing to return home. The emotional cycle of deployment was theorised by Logan (1987) and describes what military personnel and their families undergo when they are deployed for duty. Logan argued that the notification of the return date begins an emotionally taxing phase in this deployment cycle marked by both excitement and apprehension of anticipated reunion, both on behalf of the individual and of their family members. Notification of this date also often precipitates a period of counting the days until the individual's homecoming (Logan, 1987). While no research has been done on the impact of the delay of a return date in seafarers, it is speculated from what the participants described that a delayed sign off date could disrupt an already stressful experience, and thus potentially have a negative impact on the mental health of some seafarers.

8.3.5 Always on-call

Another stressor described by the participants is the impact of always being on-call when one is at sea. While on-call work is not unique to the maritime industry, it is tentatively suggested that the nature of the on-call work for seafarers is unique in its intensity. Other industries that involve on-call work have demarcated days or weeks where they are on call, but seafarers must live on call for months at a time, without a break. The reason for this is that an emergency at sea is always imminent. This is in addition to the unspoken expectation that one must always be prepared to deal with a problem, to the degree that some seafarers sleep in their work clothes, as noted by one of the participants.

This stressor relates somewhat to an already-known occupational stressor for seafarers: fatigue. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, fatigue has been identified as a significant stressor for seafarers (Hystad & Eid, 2016) with researchers touching on the fact that this is caused by the on-call nature of the job. My participants' descriptions are useful in that they reveal further information regarding the potential psychological toll that living on call may have, apart from the fatigue it may cause. Furthermore, their descriptions are in accordance with research on the matter. On-call work in general has been proven to impact negatively on an individual's sense of well-being, with the mere possibility of being disturbed by calls having negative consequences on well-being, independent of whether the individual is called in or not (Bamber, Dettmers, Funck Krahe & Vahle-Hinz, 2012). On-call work is considered to interfere with psychologically detaching from work. A lack of detachment has been associated with fatigue and emotional exhaustion (Ziebertz et al., 2015) and it is speculated that this leaves some seafarers, who are unable to leave their workplace at the end of the day, extremely vulnerable.

8.3.6 Conclusion

This section has answered the sub-question regarding the experiences of seafarers with high levels of PWB as it pertains to occupational stress. Four occupational stressors have been identified in the experiences that seafarers describe and none of these have been the subject of a significant amount of research on the matter. These include food, delayed sign-off, lack of recognition and always being on call.

Interestingly, many of the known stressors facing seafarers, discussed in the initial chapters of this thesis, were not highlighted directly as sources of stress by the participants, for example social isolation. While it has been noted already in this section that this highlights the use of qualitative research methods, it also creates questions around why this was the case. One of the reasons for this could be that the pandemic has changed the nature of stressors for seafarers. This could be the case with delayed sign-off, which may have become much more of a stressful experience for seafarers with the increased levels of global uncertainty in general. However, this does not explain already identified stressors such as a deleterious work environment or the impact of multiculturalism. In response to this it is speculated that certain well-being practices developed by the participants could be acting as a significant buffer to typical stressors already identified in the literature. If this is the case, then the role of well-being practices in the lives of seafarers is a crucial one.

8.4 Research sub-question 2

8.4.1 Introduction

This section answers the following research sub-question:
How is well-being experienced by a group of seafarers who report high levels of PWB?

The group of participants shared several experiences that illustrated specific strategies that appear to act as buffers against occupational stressors and seem to contribute to their reported high levels of PWB.

8.4.2 A positive attitude / positive emotion

The current study found that participants with reportedly high levels of PWB can see the positive in things, or to learn from experiences that are negative. It was also evident in many of the participants' descriptions that choosing to have a positive attitude on board was a learned response. Seligman and Steen (2005) found that engaging individuals in interventions that teach optimism and how to adopt a good attitude towards work were extremely effective. For example, one of the interventions involved individuals recording, each day for a week, three good things that happened to them and why these good things occurred. The researchers found that after completing this exercise, the individuals participating in the intervention were happier and less depressed at three-month follow up, as compared to a control group who had not participated in the intervention (Seligman & Steen 2005). This is significant for the maritime industry – it is suggested firstly that positive attitude or optimism towards work could be something that may improve seafarer well-being and secondly, that this is a skill that could be taught to seafarers through interventions such as the one used by Seligman and Steen (2005). Teaching this skill to seafarers would also directly benefit shipping companies as it has been proven that positive emotion and optimism towards work are associated with greater organisational commitment and job satisfaction, which in return enhance work performance of the individual (Linz, 2003).

8.4.3 Acceptance

Apart from looking on the bright side, some of the participants also showed the ability to accept certain realities within their professional lives without contesting these or becoming too attached to the idea of what should or should not be. Interestingly, this is how some of the participants described managing delayed sign-off, which was also described by these same participants as a significant stressor for a seafarer and discussed in the preceding section. From a psychological perspective, acceptance involves paying attention to both internal and

external events, while intentionally withholding from positively or negatively evaluating these events (Thompson, Arnkoff & Glass, 2011). Acceptance-based psychological skills are central components to several evidence-based psychological interventions, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes et al., 1999) and dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan, 1993). The theory behind these psychological Interventions is certainly in line with an increased sense of well-being, which is what this study's participants seemed to enjoy from practising acceptance. These interventions theorise that avoidance and non-mindful behaviour related to stressful or even traumatic events promote posttraumatic symptoms, while acceptance produces healing (Thompson et al., 2011). Researchers thus argue that if acceptance skills help individuals post their traumatic experiences, then individuals with pre-trauma acceptance skills could be less likely to exhibit post traumatic symptoms following stress or trauma (Thompson et al., 2011). This argument could elucidate the acceptance skills noted in some of the participants with reportedly high PWB; in other words, acceptance skills may be acting as a buffer against the significant occupational stressors faced by seafarers. Further research is needed to clarify this.

Acceptance has been cited as a critical skill needed for high stress industries. For example, Bond and Hayes (2002) found that acceptance skills improved general mental health and symptoms of depression in a large sample of employees working in the media industry. Another study showed the impact acceptance skills have on stress levels – an acceptance intervention was trialled with the New Zealand defence force (Harvey et al., 2018). The sample consisted of 292 soldiers referred to the study for anger, alcohol use and stress-related issues. The intervention was brief, lasting one week, and consisting of daily sessions on topics related to acceptance. At both one- and three-month marks post treatment, participants showed significant decreases in their levels of anger and aggression, perceived stress and alcohol consumption. Several other fairly recent studies have suggested the positive impact that acceptance interventions have had on military personnel well-being and quality of life, matching the findings of this study (see Mohammadi, Dowran, Rabie & Salimi, 2017; Donahue, Santanello, Marsiglio & van Male, 2017 and Yazarloo, Kalantari & Mehrabi, 2018).

A potential benefit to teaching seafarers this psychological strategy could be felt by employers as well as individual seafarers. Research shows that acceptance allows people to use their internal energies – normally given over to avoidance of the situation, control of the events, rumination of what should or should not be, or resignation – to act in a way that is more in line with their goals (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette & Stroshal, 1996). Hayes et al. (1996) argue that instead of using attentional resources to change or control a situation that is not within their control, the individual is able to enact choices related to behaviours that reach their valued

goals, such as (in the case of some of the participants of this study) making the most of the experience on board or being a good employee. This is illustrated by the study conducted by Bond and Hayes (2002) of employees in the media industry – the acceptance skills intervention was also found to influence a performance-related variable, namely propensity to innovate, illustrating Haye's (1996) argument regarding attentional resources. If acceptance is what is contributing to some of the participants' sense of well-being, then a potential implication of this is that acceptance could be taught to other seafarers to improve their well-being while at the same time benefiting the industry itself with improved employee performance. Further research into this is needed to clarify this suggestion.

8.4.4 Self-awareness and denial

Acceptance theory also emphasises the concept of people being aware of their feelings, behaviour, motivation and internal events (Hayes et al., 1999). For an individual to practice acceptance, self-awareness is necessary, for only by being aware of one's feelings, can they be accepted (Hayes et al., 1999). This is in line with another of this study's findings – some of the participants described being aware of their emotions and thinking patterns, and monitoring them closely, illustrating Hayes' argument that there is an association between self-awareness and acceptance. This is in line with research discussed in the literature review: in Salyga's (2006) study of Lithuanian and Latvian seafarers, a prognostic factor linked to psycho-emotional stress included the seafarer's self-evaluation of their health status, emphasising the usefulness of self-awareness with regards to seafarer well-being.

Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan and Adler (1998) identified the concept of self-awareness as being an essential social and emotional competency, and central to emotional intelligence (see also Gardner, 1983 and Goleman, 1996). In addition to this, several psychological theories emphasise the importance of self-awareness. For example, self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) argues that awareness is essential in facilitating the choice of behaviours that are congruent with one's values and needs. Research has also found that individuals with high self-awareness have greater insight and understanding (Lopes, Salovey, Côté, Beers & Petty, 2005). Self-awareness is also a skill that many militaries have intentionally included in their training. A resilience training intervention was offered to 21 trainees in the Australian Defence Force (Crane et al., 2019). Qualitative findings suggested that self-reflection may reinforce coping self-efficacy, and also encourage the application of coping strategies (Crane et al., 2019). This is clearly evident in this study's participants, who seem to enjoy a variety of effective coping strategies to deal with stress. Jordan and Ashkanasy (2006) proved that emotional self-awareness is a key predictor of team effectiveness, and therefore, team performance. This was also seen in British Navy personnel.

Young and Dulewicz (2006) found that being aware of one's feelings is a threshold competency in officers and ratings; in other words, self-awareness is a core competency in navy personnel. In addition to this the researchers found that self-awareness allows navy personnel to evaluate their performance at work accurately, and therefore continually review the effectiveness of their activities at work.

Self-awareness has also been found to be positively associated with the degree of importance to which a person ascribes self-care (Richards, Campenni & Muse-Burke, 2010). It could therefore be hypothesised that prioritising self-care is something else my participants are doing to increase their PWB. The implications of this are that increasing the degree of self-awareness in seafarers might be one of the first steps in ensuring that they prioritise self-care and thus well-being, and also apply effective coping strategies to manage their experiences of occupational stress.

It must be noted that forms of self-awareness have been linked to negative experiences and traits such as anxiety (Wells, 1985) and depression (Ingram & Smith, 1884). Trapnell and Campbell (1999) refer to this dual nature of self-awareness as the "self-absorption paradox" (p. 286) which they describe as the situation when one is "sadder but wiser" (p. 299). To illustrate this point, consider two forms of self-awareness – rumination and reflection. Rumination is defined as "a style of recurrent negative thinking in which the causes, consequences, and implications of negative events and feelings are repetitively analysed" (Baer, 2007, p. 240) and is strongly associated with negative well-being. Ruminating would obviously not be beneficial to seafarers who already spend inordinate amounts of time alone with their thoughts. Trapnell and Campbell (1999) argued that reflection rather than rumination is the key to improved PWB and described reflection as a way of thinking about the meaning and motivation of feelings and behaviours in oneself. Taking this into consideration, it is tentatively suggested that first, healthy forms of self-awareness, such as reflection, could be taught to seafarers. This is especially since self-awareness is seen by psychologists as a malleable trait and its degree of accuracy can be improved (Nieworth, 2009). Second, questions remain about the specific ways in which the seafarers engage in self-awareness, and further research on this is needed.

It can also be argued that some of these participants think they are self-aware when in actual fact they engage more in blocking out negative emotions to cope with life at sea. It could be argued that in some of their descriptions, denial is more evident than self-awareness. As noted in the previous chapter, the participants' descriptions of being self-aware failed to include many specific examples of them practising this skill, despite my asking for examples. It is

wondered if this lack of specific examples means that these participants choose actively not to be aware of what they are feeling in an effort to avoid difficult emotions. Although outdated, it is worth considering the opinion of researchers who published a paper in a 1995 journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Bonanno, Keltner, Holen & Horowitz, 1995). Entitled *When Avoiding Unpleasant Emotions Might Not Be Such a Bad Thing*, these researchers argued that avoiding negative emotions might serve an adaptive function that benefits the individual. More recent research has revisited the role of avoidance in mental health, with some researchers believing it does have an adaptive function (see for example Ottaviani et al., 2014). Hoffman and Hay (2018) explored the role of avoidance in anxiety disorders and the treatment thereof and found that avoidance (which they termed disengagement) can be adaptive in the short-term if a situation is perceived as uncontrollable. This sounds similar to radical acceptance. There is, however, a key difference. Disengagement refers more to denial of emotions in the first place, rather than radical acceptance of a situation, and it was this that was evident in what some of the participants were saying in their descriptions of cruising along, for example. Hoffman and Hay (2018) note that denial is effective as a short-term strategy if the situation is either uncontrollable or too threatening. Other researchers have suggested that denial is useful in certain situations but have referred to the concept in other ways. For example, Waugh, Singh and Furr (2020) found that positive distraction, which involves not thinking about the stressor or engaging in activities that induce positive emotions, is an effective strategy for coping with stress. In their study of over 1000 university students, they found that positive distraction was related to higher levels of well-being and positive emotion. Significant to seafarers, these results led the researchers to recommend that positive distraction as a coping technique should be incorporated into coping interventions for university students. Could it be that these participants are indeed self-aware, but they have also developed the skill of using denial as a positive coping skill? Their reportedly high levels of PWB make this a plausible hypothesis, but further investigation into this is needed to confirm this.

8.4.5 Social interaction and banter / relationships

Self-awareness is highly associated with positive social interaction (Lopes et al., 2004) and thus it is not surprising that another characteristic evident in the description of these participants is that they place considerable value on social interaction with their crewmates. The current study found that many of the participants enjoy and intentionally gravitate towards social interaction with their fellow seafarers on board, and it is wondered about the degree to which this impacts on their sense of well-being. It is plausible that there would be a connection here since a lack of social interaction has been posited as a negative consequence of ensuring TV and Internet access in individual cabins onboard. As noted in the literature review, these

resources, initially offered as a means to improve seafarer well-being, have become a reason for seafarers to retreat to their cabins to watch TV and movies at the end of a shift, rather than choosing to socialise with other members of the crew (Carol-Dekker, 2018).

The positive impact that social interaction at work has on well-being has been proven in previous studies of other work environments, with a myriad of research proving the protective nature that social connectedness can play in promoting well-being and posttraumatic growth (Scrignaro et al., 2011). This finding is also in accordance with previous research in seafarers. Lipowski et al. (2014), Jeżewska et al. (2013) and Slišković (2015) found that extraversion is linked to well-being in seafarers. While these researchers focused on the fact that extraversion is a personality trait, it can be proposed that extraversion in a sense (as in being friendly and sociable) could be a strategy to improve well-being. Choosing to engage in social interaction on board is something seafarers can do fairly regularly while at sea. Apart from benefits to well-being, researchers have indicated that social interaction positively impacts job satisfaction (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Bagienska, 2021). This is because when one is psychologically isolated at work, it is common to experience unfulfillment because of insufficient social interaction and team support (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Bagienska, 2021). A second benefit to social interaction is that it has a direct impact on a worker's ability to succeed, with greater goal attainment found in employees who experience greater levels of social interaction (Luecking, Fabian, Tilson, Donovan & Fabian, 2004).

Social interaction facilitates banter, and banter was discussed positively by the participants. Banter is defined as informal, playful joking and humorous, teasing remarks, and is a sophisticated tool that enables people to engage in difficult topics, build relationships and share experiences (Wilcock, James & Cooper, 2019). It is wondered whether there is a connection between high levels of well-being and the presence of banter while at sea. While further research is needed to clarify this specifically, previous research has highlighted the role of banter on board, the importance of which was first suggested by Sampson and Zhao (2003). They found that joking and banter were integral components of social interaction on board, and that not being able to understand or partake in this form of social interaction could result in the seafarer feeling isolated. Banter has certainly been identified as a crucial well-being factor in other industries. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the unfortunate reduction of banter amongst nurses in hospitals who no longer spend lunch or tea breaks together and are restricted from social interaction owing to the presence of PPE equipment (Lambert & Mahon, 2021). Its absence has subsequently established it as an essential component to the psychological well-being of nurses. Similarly, Wilcock et al. (2019) report that banter is welcomed at different workplaces. Their study of over 1 000 participants

across a variety of industries found that the majority of people view it as playing a positive role in building relationships and learning to get along with colleagues. Workplace humour and joking has also been proven to reduce anxiety (Cann et al., 2000; Romero & Pescosolido, 2008), tension (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006) and stress (Blanchard, Stewart, Cann & Follman, 2014; Cann et al., 2014). Moreover, humour has been found to improve employee mood (Mesmer-Magnus, Glew & Viswesvaran, 2012) and is thus cited as a useful tool for building a positive atmosphere in the workplace. Humour has been found to alleviate feelings of workplace stress in two ways. First, it results in the individual viewing the stress-invoking environment as less threatening and second, humour helps the individual to appraise stressors as less threatening (Kuiper, McKenzie, & Belanger, 1995). This might be effective for seafarers whose working environment is stressful for several reasons that are out of their control and not deemed to change any time soon.

Banter has been the topic of some research pertaining to female officers in the military and described as key to fitting into the male-dominated armed forces. For female military personnel, joining in with banter is seen as a way of becoming *one of the lads* (Godier-McBard, Gillin & Fossey, 2021) and, as noted in the literature review, Suter et al. (2006) found that women maintain and reproduce atypical gender identities while at service to assimilate into a masculine culture. This was evident in one of the female seafarer's descriptions of banter, who mentioned the importance of having a laugh with "the boys" and how doing so meant that her male colleagues would "always have your back". This result also ties well with another study mentioned in the literature review. Kitada (2010) found that the unbalanced ratio of men and women on board results in women using identity management strategies to present themselves in more feminine or masculine ways, depending on the context, to deal with the sense of isolation they feel on board.

Although banter was discussed in a positive light by the participants, previous research on the issue has found that it can play a negative role on board. As mentioned in the literature review, Sampson and Zhao (2003) found that banter and joking is risky among multinational crews, where culture could influence whether or not the joke is understood. The consequence of banter on board is that the inability to participate in social banter and joking could result in some seafarers of different cultures feeling isolated. Wilcock et al. (2019) noted that when banter is abused, it can have dire effects on the victim, and this is something to consider particularly when it comes to women on board. As noted by one of the participants, she tries to assist other female seafarers who are unsure if they are being subject to banter or if they are being sexually harassed. It is tentatively suggested that banter could expose female seafarers to increased chances of sexual harassment. As already noted in the literature

review, a recent study found that sexual harassment cases lodged by women are under-reported owing to fear that the situation would be passed off as banter (Pike et al., 2021). These findings about the negative role of banter for female seafarers are extremely disturbing in at least two ways. First, if female seafarers are proven to partake in banter as a strategy to assimilate into a male-dominated culture, but this strategy exposes them to sexual harassment, then they are forced potentially to choose between participating in conversation that denies them of their human rights or accepting being isolated from the male crew on board. The latter was discussed by Thomas (2003) who found that the majority of female seafarers in the study not only accepted being isolated from their male counterparts but took active steps to avoid unwanted attention of a sexual nature, such as avoiding social situations. Second, if male seafarers benefit from banter as a strategy to improve their PWB, it might very well be at the expense of their female crewmates.

8.4.6 Meaning

Social interaction has also been found to influence another factor that may contribute to the well-being of the participants. Wrześniewski, Dutton & Debebe (2003) propose that daily interactions with others at work plays a central role in employees building meaning into their work. Meaning seems to form an integral part of the majority of the participants' work at sea. Meaning has been touched on in previous research on seafarers. As discussed in the literature review, Fei and Lu (2015) noted that in traditional maritime nations, such as the Philippines or China, seafaring is often a calling, rooted in a long history and solid tradition of sailing, often within the family. The significance of this study's finding regarding meaning is the potential role that meaning could play in the well-being of some seafarers.

Ryff (1989) wrote extensively on well-being and mental health and proposed that a definition of mental health should include the feeling that there is purpose and meaning to one's life and this feeling is illustrated in some of the ways that the participants describe their roles. For example, two of the participants focus on supporting cadets during their time at sea, with one specifically mentioning how much he enjoys the sense of meaning that comes from doing this. This is in line with research by Grant (2007; 2008) who found that jobs and tasks designed to have a positive impact on others are related to greater experiences of meaningful work. Grant (2007) also argued that individuals should ideally be able to engage in a process of creative job-crafting, aligning their tasks more with their values and passions. Again, this was evident in the participants' descriptions of their roles, one participant defining herself as a mother hen to her male colleagues, and another identifying himself as the kind of person who ensures that he leaves the ship in a better condition than when he arrived. This was creative thinking on behalf of these participants, and further investigation into exactly how these participants were

able to do this is warranted. One of the factors that could be at play here is personality. Studies have found that one's personality and associated values play a role in finding meaning in work, and thus some people are more predisposed than others to find work meaningful. For example, Britt, Adler and Bartone (2001) found that military personnel with the personality trait hardiness were more able to find deployment meaningful. Rosso, Dekas and Wrześniewski (2010) found that benevolence is positively correlated with the ability to find meaning in work. It could therefore be the case that these participants have intrinsic factors that result in their finding meaning at work, suggesting that higher levels of well-being in some seafarers could potentially be associated with their personality or values. Further research is needed to clarify this.

Fortunately, other studies have found that meaning at work is something that can be developed in other ways if it is not something that comes naturally to an individual. Research indicates that one of the ways an individual can find meaning at work is through deploying signature strengths (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). This is what one of the participants experienced when a captain called her and asked her to join his ship to boost the morale of the crew with her sunny disposition. She then joined this ship, defining herself as a mother hen to her male colleagues, finding meaning and purpose in the role. Other researchers have argued that while personality or trait-level individual differences are indeed relevant to finding meaning, the most important individual factors include goal-directedness and prosocial motivation (Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy & Steger, 2013). They go on to note that since not all employees are goal-directed or motivated pro-socially, organisations play an integral role in creating opportunities for the development of these characteristics (Lysova et al., 2013). One of the ways this can be done is by helping employees to connect their daily tasks to the goals and aspirations of the organisation itself. This is illustrated by an anecdote about President John F. Kennedy who visited NASA and helped the employees to connect their daily tasks to the aspirations of the agency (Carton, 2017). Apparently, employees started to view their daily work ''not as short-term tasks (I'm building electrical circuits) but as the pursuit of NASA's long-term objective (I'm putting a man on the moon)'' (Carton, 2017, p. 323). The role that organisations could play in developing meaning in seafarers is especially noteworthy when considering what has already been mentioned in the literature review regarding maritime students. Adruskiene et al. (2015) found that maritime students view their future careers as highly stressful, and Zhang (2010) stressed the critical need for maritime students firstly to be educated about mental health and secondly provided with adequate psychosocial support. Taking this into consideration, it is tentatively suggested that the development of meaning at work could become a third component to educating maritime students.

8.4.7 Mentoring

The participants spoke about the support that they have received over the course of their careers, as well as opportunities to offer this support and guidance to others. It seems that this support, both offered and received, could be something that contributes to the mental well-being of the participants and could be defined as mentoring. Mentoring is a kind of exchange between a more senior or experienced person (mentor) and a junior or less experienced colleague (mentee) in which the senior person offers guidance, feedback and support with regards to personal and career development (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban & Wilbanks, 2011). Mentoring has been proven to benefit the mentee by alleviating their work pressure and improving self-efficacy (Hu, Wang, Wang, Chen & Jiang, 2016). Most of the participants who described mentoring relationships had actually taken on the role of mentor, rather than being on the receiving end of such support. This is in line with previous studies which have found that mentoring is mutually beneficial for those involved (Haggard et al., 2011). These results indicate that mentoring could be a way to boost well-being in seafarers while also ensuring that those seafarers who are being mentored are supported.

8.4.8 Conclusion

Identified in the experiences the participants described are strategies such as fostering a positive attitude, embracing acceptance of things as they are, being self-aware, understanding the importance of social interaction, finding meaning in one's role and partaking in mentoring relationships. These strategies could be adding to the seafarer's sense of psychological well-being, and further exploration into these strategies is warranted to confirm this. These findings are particularly significant because there has been no research on what might contribute to seafarer psychological well-being.

8.5 Research sub-question 3

8.5.1 Introduction

This section answers the following research sub-question:
How is mental health experienced by a group of seafarers (who report high levels of PWB)?

8.5.2 Mental health stigma

The stigma regarding mental health issues was discussed at length in the introduction to this thesis, as well as the literature review. Researchers have found that the stigmatisation of mental illness makes it far less likely for seafarers to disclose personal difficulties with mental health (Stuart, 2016 and Jagosh et al., 2017). The exact reasons for this stigma are varied.

Some researchers argue that, since fitness for duty is an essential prerequisite for the job, seafarers may fear disclosing mental health problems as they view the disclosure as a threat to re-employment (Stuart, 2016). Another argument is that there exists in the industry a culture of self-reliance and asking for help is simply not done (Jagosh et al., 2017). The findings of this study shed further light on this issue by suggesting one of the possible reasons for the issue of mental health being taboo. The participants describe different experiences that suggest that people with mental health problems are viewed as not only unpredictable, but also dangerous. In addition, many of the participants appear to link the issue of mental health to insanity or craziness and described situations in which the are mentally ill were seen as dangerous.

The perspective of the mentally ill being unstable and dangerous is a long-standing controversy that has been the subject of research spanning decades (Davis, 1991). Research has found that despite sufficient evidence that people with mental illness are unlikely to be dangerous, many people continue to hold to this discourse. For example, Walker and Read (2002) proved that people's primary impression on mental illness is that it leads to unpredictable behaviours and loss of control. A more recent study that examined trends in the perceptions of the American public regarding violence and mental health across a twenty-two-year period found that 60% of respondents believe that people who meet the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia are dangerous to others, and 68% of respondents believed that people with alcohol dependence pose a threat to others (Pescosolido, Manago & Monahan, 2019). The problem with this stigma, and all stigma for that matter, is that it impacts how people respond to those who are mentally ill. Corrigan, Watson and Barr (2006) found that when confronted with the perception that someone is mentally ill, and thus dangerous or unpredictable, individuals tend to respond with either fear or anger. First, those who respond with anger tend to believe that psychological disorders are controlled by the individual, in contrast to physical conditions that *happen to* an individual (Mariano, 2020). People who respond with anger assume that the individual can be held accountable for the disorder, and often develop feelings of resentment (Mariano, 2020). If this is the case in the maritime industry, for a seafarer who is unable to leave their place of work at the end of the day, it could be extremely difficult working and living with crewmates who feel a sense of resentment towards them. Second, research also supports the notion that people who are afraid of those who are mentally ill respond with avoidant behaviour, which is problematic as it potentially isolates the mentally ill individual even further (Mariano, 2020).

This finding is significant for two reasons. First, it could potentially narrow the focus when it comes to dealing with the issue of stigma in the maritime industry. Research and interventions

could start by investigating and targeting the idea that mentally ill people are dangerous rather than addressing all the assumptions underlying stigma that may or may not exist in the industry. This is in line with researchers who argue that an in-depth understanding of the specific prejudices and stereotypes towards mental illness is one of the fundamental first steps to improving the efficacy of mental health interventions (Monteith & Pettit, 2011). Second, this finding could point to the importance of helping seafarers understand their personal responses to people with mental illness. There are arguably two primary responses to mental illness – one involves a sense of pity that prompts feelings of compassion and sympathy for an individual who is fragile and somewhat incapacitated (Mariano, 2020). The other, already discussed and a common response to the idea that someone who is mentally ill is dangerous, involves anger and resentment towards an individual who is responsible for their situation in the first place (Mariano, 2020). Both reactions can be perceived as a stigma as they highlight the presence of stereotypes about mental illness. It is cautiously suggested that assisting seafarers to identify how they respond to people with mental health difficulties might be a first, and easier, step towards uncovering stereotypes and biases regarding mental health.

This finding is also in line with that made by Zafran et al. (2017). These researchers found that their study generated data regarding mental illness that added to the literature on the epistemology of the diagnoses of mental illness; in other words, how knowledge involving the diagnosis of mental illness is acquired. In essence, this involves answering the question: *how do I know someone can be diagnosed with a mental illness?* These researchers identified two primary ways and found both to be accurate – one way using the medical model to make a clinical diagnosis, and the other using interviews to understand the individual's subjective experience. Similarly, my study was able to take a step towards understanding how the knowledge of someone with poor mental health might be acquired by some seafarers – in essence, answering the question: *how do I know someone has poor mental health?* For the participants, this seems to be through observations and reports of behaviour considered to be unpredictable or unusual. It is wondered whether this would be the case with other seafarers. This finding could potentially contribute to the literature on the epistemology of mental illness from the perspective of seafarers, although further research is needed to clarify the extent to which seafarers as a population decide that someone has poor mental health.

8.5.3 Mental health interventions

Another issue related to mental health is that any interventions the participants have done are seen as lip service. The participants described these interventions, in their perspective at least, not as helpful or supportive on behalf of shipping companies, but as allegiance to the issue expressed in words but not backed by deeds. One of the potential reasons for this is that there

is very much a physical separation between shore management and seafarers on board. At least this was seen to be the case regarding physical safety on board. Xue, Tang and Walters (2017) found that shore management has been shown to prioritise efficient production (in other words, fast sailing) over safety, while on board it is, understandably, the other way around. Xue et al. (2017) went on to argue that even though many shipping companies are committed to safety procedures on paper, this commitment is not felt by seafarers on board. From what the participants described, it is wondered whether this might be the case with mental health. There may be a gap between management rhetoric regarding mental health and the lived experience of the seafarer. While any mental health initiatives might be well-intentioned, they do not seem to be having the desired impact, at least for the participants of this study. This finding is important as it highlights how companies, who are investing funds into mental health initiatives, might in actual fact be making the situation worse by doing so. This also underscores the need for further research to determine from seafarers themselves what kind of mental health or wellness initiatives and interventions would be of use to them.

Another significance to this finding is that it highlights the importance of perceived organisational support (POS) in the lives of seafarers. POS refers to the employee's perception of the extent to which he/she is valued and cared for by the organisation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and has been found to influence the behaviour, mood, attitude, and job involvement of employees (Cole, Schaninger & Harris, 2002). In a meta-analysis that reviewed over 70 studies on POS, four factors were found to correlate positively with a high level of employee POS (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). These included fairness at work, support from one's supervisor, organisational rewards and favourable job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This finding could shed light on other findings in this study, one of these being poor quality food. This, identified as a considerable occupational stressor by the participants, might be a factor that presents an unfavourable working condition, thus potentially impacting seafarer POS.

8.5.4 Conclusion

These findings are useful in that they have emphasised how some of the participants seem to view people who are mentally ill as dangerous or unpredictable. While further research is needed to clarify how much this is evident in the wider population, this could potentially narrow the focus when it comes to dealing with the issue of stigma in the maritime industry. As noted, this section also took a step towards understanding how the knowledge of someone with poor mental health might be acquired by some seafarers, with the participants relying on observations of extreme and unusual behaviour. This section has also highlighted the need

for further research to determine from seafarers themselves what kind of mental health or wellness initiatives would be of useful to them.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

I took it up and held it close to the light, and felt it and smelt it, and tried every way possible to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion about it.

Moby Dick, *(Melville, 1988, p. 43)*

9.1 Introduction to chapter

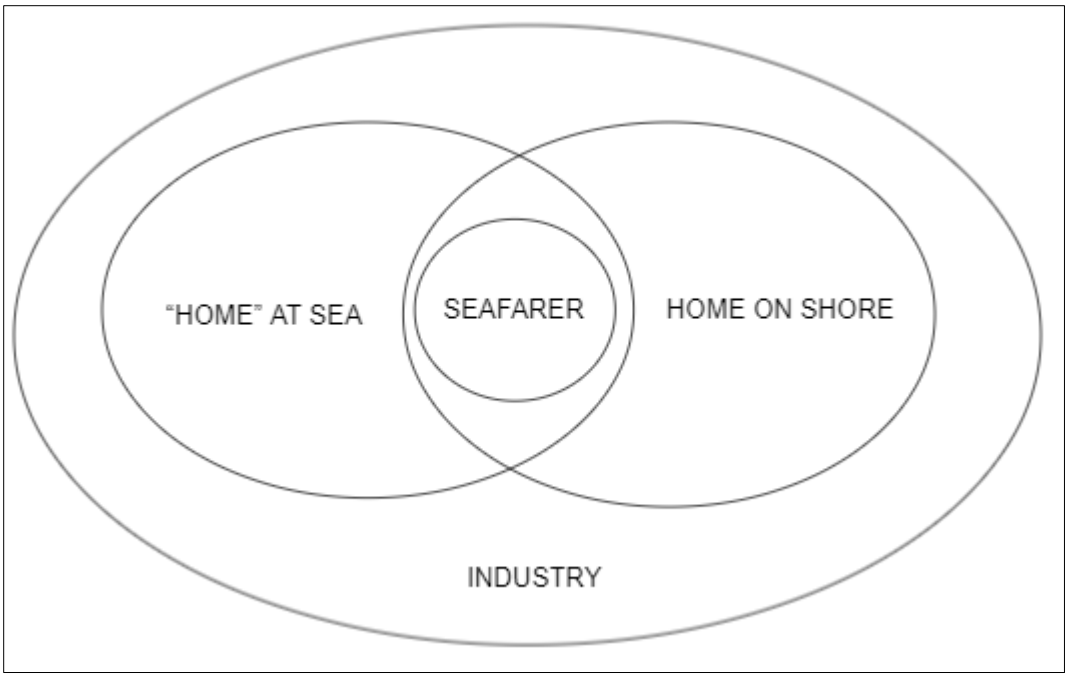
This chapter introduces a schematic representation of the recommendations I will make related to seafarer well-being. This schematic representation could be used by seafarers themselves and stakeholders in the industry to organise, assess and track seafarer well-being interventions. This chapter will also evaluate the research conducted for this thesis, discuss limitations, and make suggestions for future research.

9.2 A schematic representation of recommendations

To organise the recommendations, I have presented them schematically (see *Fig. 20*). It is hoped that presenting the recommendations in this way will help them to be organised in a succinct manner.

Figure 17

A schematic representation of recommendations



The seafarer forms the centre of the schematic representation, and the first set of recommendations will be focused on the individual seafarer, who must be equipped with skills that contribute to good mental health. Recommendations will then focus on the different contexts in which the seafarer lives. This is because the findings of this study suggest that there may exist a complex dynamic between the seafarer's different contexts. The seafarer must move between his home on shore and his "home" at sea, which are completely separate from each other, yet each is called home by the seafarer for months at a time. Finally, recommendations will focus on the maritime industry. The seafarer operates within an industry that must be a focus of well-being with regards to industry culture, perspectives on mental health and policies.

9.3 Recommendations

I have made various findings from the participants' lived experiences of well-being on board. While these findings are cautious, and more research is needed to explore these findings and ascertain whether they apply to the general seafaring population, a few recommendations have been made. These recommendations should be viewed as tentative starting points of an explorative process into the topic of seafarer well-being and should themselves be accompanied by further research. This qualitative study is not about making generalisable claims that apply beyond the accounts of the participants in this study; however, it is useful to suggest a research agenda to further explore some of the lessons that are implied by the experiences of the participants.

9.3.1 Well-being for the individual seafarer

Previous research has shown that extraversion as a personality trait assists seafarers with mitigating the stress experienced at work (Silišković, 2015). Sampson and Ellis (2019) have also recommended that seafarers be provided with resilience training, and Iverson (2011) with mental health training. Apart from these recommendations, there were several factors identified in this study that might possibly contribute to seafarer well-being.

9.3.1.1 Seafarers could be taught identity management strategies

Some of the seafarers with reportedly high levels of well-being appear to be able to move between the world at sea and the world at home fairly easily, seeming to adjust their behaviour, language and day to day routines with apparent ease. This has emerged as a new finding that requires further exploration. As a starting point, seafarers could be taught identity management strategies to assist them in managing this potential complexity. Some of the participants in this study described enjoying the feeling of moving in and out of different roles,

living mindfully and focusing on the context in which they find themselves, and taking time out when they get home to adjust. These are strategies that could be taught to maritime students, who might also benefit just from being made aware of the impact that living in two worlds may potentially have on their identity. As mentioned, mindfulness training, proven to have an impact on self-reference or sense of self (Farb et al., 2007) would also benefit seafarers in this regard

9.3.1.2 Seafarers could be taught the significance of social interaction

Silišković (2015) has found that extraversion is a personality trait that helps seafarers in their management of stress. While not all seafarers have this personality trait, it is argued that teaching seafarers the vital nature of social interaction to their mental health might be a key step in improving seafarer well-being. Indeed, other researchers (Sampson and Ellis, 2019 and Carotenuto, 2013) have recommended various onboard facilities to encourage social interaction amongst seafarers and teaching them how one benefits from being sociable might be the first step in ensuring they use these facilities. In addition, those in charge such as ship owners, company managers, captains and first mates could focus on including facilities and events that promote social interaction amongst their crews.

9.3.1.3 Seafarers could engage in psychological skills training

Psychological skills training is defined as “the behavioural devices that help human beings lead their life full of happiness, free of stress, enjoyable and healthy, both physically and mentally” (Singh & Kaur, 2020, p. 1). Singh and Kaur (2020) identified several these psychological skills, namely persistence, self-motivation, strong moral character, leadership, time management, emotional arousal control and applying mental energy techniques. The psychological skills that were identified in this study as potentially benefiting the participants include acceptance, positive attitude, finding meaning and self-awareness. Singh and Kaur (2020) also note that psychological skills can be learned and practised. For example, acceptance has been successfully taught to teenagers battling with binge-eating disorder to improve symptoms of the disorder (Burton, Kamody, Pluhar, Grey & Abdullah, 2020) and to psychiatry resident doctors to prevent burnout (Bentley, Kaplan & Mokonogho, 2018). Acceptance is also being taught in school settings to primary and high school students (Chugani et al., 2021). Psychological skills training has been used successfully among athletes to improve sports performance, for example with baseball players (Vidic & Cherup, 2020) and football players (Konter, Beckmann & Mallet, 2019). With the industry stigma surrounding mental health, framing psychological skills training from a different perspective, such as sport, might make some seafarers more receptive to learning these skills.

9.3.1.4 Seafarer could engage in mentoring relationships

A system of mentoring, where seafarers are given opportunities both to have a mentor and be a mentor to someone else, could be implemented by shipping companies.

9.3.2 A healthy home

Both home environments, sea and shore, need to be an area of focus when it comes to well-being.

9.3.2.1 Ensure well-being at “home” at sea

Well-being at home (while at sea) has been the focus of research, with Sampson and Ellis (2019) and Carotenuto (2013) identifying through interviews with seafarers a variety of strategies that could improve well-being, such as comfortable mattresses, good quality food, recreational activities, Internet access and good quality support networks on board. In this study, the potential psychological impact of poor-quality food was suggested through what the participants described – some of the participants discussed how food boosts crew morale and has played a role in causing conflict on board. While further research is needed to clarify these findings, this information might be useful for shipping companies, who decide on budget allocations for food.

9.3.2.2 Ensure well-being at home on shore

The findings of this study point to the potential importance of psycho-education initiatives for families, matching previous findings. Ulven et al. (2007) identified the need for spousal support amongst seafarers. A few support groups exist, for example there is a Facebook page called Girlfriends / Spouses of Seafarers and Tang (2021) found that seafarer spouses receive a great deal of support from a website called Home of Chinese Seafarers (HCS). Companies could look at creating more of these social media platforms or connecting spouses or partners to each other based on location. Another recommendation is for families to be educated on how to deal with factors that impact them such as delayed sign-off.

9.3.3 A healthy industry

The industry itself needs to adopt various strategies to ensure well-being. Several strategies have been recommended such as psychological training for maritime students (Jing, 2010) and psychoeducation for seafarers (Carotenuto et al., 2012 and Iverson, 2011). Zarocostas (2020) recommended that seafarers be designated as key workers to streamline their travelling between countries during the pandemic and since April 2021 about 62 countries have done so (Nortun, 2021). This recommendation might also address another potential

stressor suggested by the participants – that of being unappreciated for the work they do and the sacrifices they make. The current study has highlighted other ways that the industry can improve seafarer well-being, which will be outlined in the points that follow.

9.3.3.1 Raise awareness and understanding

First, shipping companies and crew change departments might benefit in increasing their understanding of the psychological impact that delayed sign off may potentially have on seafarers and their families. While crew change departments are under great pressure to manage the difficult task of placing seafarers, it might be helpful simply to be aware of the suffering delayed sign-off could possibly cause, both for the seafarer and their family. In addition to this, and as Carol-Dekker (2018) recommends, a greater understanding of the complexity of culture on board, even if it is just knowing that there are several components to marine culture, could also result in a more tolerant workplace.

9.3.3.2 Frame mental health initiatives differently

Second, mental health interventions and psychological skills training initiatives could be framed in ways that are not related to mental health, to move away from the stigma surrounding mental health. Referring to well-being interventions as motivational talks, for example, might make seafarers more open to receiving the information. Third, it is recommended that the industry start focusing on mental health from the perspective of positive psychology, teaching skills that contribute to well-being.

9.4 Evaluation of study

Smith (2011) details seven considerations of *what makes a good IPA paper* which will be attended to in this section. I will be using these considerations to assess my work.

9.4.1 A good IPA paper has a clear focus

The focus of this thesis was made explicit in the introduction. This was the well-being of seafarers. This focus was kept at the forefront in all the chapters of this thesis. The research questions were specifically aligned with the research goals, which ensured that this focus on well-being remained clear.

9.4.2 A good IPA paper has strong data

This study prioritised the perspectives of its participants, using their words and perspectives as focal points from which any interpretation was made. The interview schedule was structured

in a way that ensured the focus remained on well-being, but also that there was sufficient freedom for participant expression.

Using a questionnaire to recruit participants for an interview was especially useful. It afforded me the chance to identify potential participants for the interview who willingly provided me with their contact details with the full knowledge that they were to be approached for an interview. The questionnaire seemed to serve as the initial bait in the recruitment process. Contacting potential participants out of the blue and requesting an interview might not have been as successful. Because of this, I was able to recruit 13 participants (12 whose data was used) which is the maximum amount recommended for an IPA study. The participants were also primed for the interview because they had already completed a questionnaire about psychological well-being. This may have proved useful in prompting them to start thinking about well-being at sea before the interview, possibly contributing to richer data that had been considered before the interview.

9.4.3 A good IPA study is rigorous

A study is rigorous if it applies the appropriate research tools to meet the goals of the study. I closely followed the steps outlined for IPA research. Ongoing supervision verified the findings and analysis of the study and supervision occurred at each significant stage of analysis of the data. This ongoing supervision ensured that I engaged in a process of iteration with my supervisor, so that ‘‘each stage [of research] can potentially lead to revising prior interpretive decisions (Smith & Nizza, 2021, p. 31). For example, two sub-themes that I had initially identified were removed from the final thesis as, after discussion, my supervisor and I noted that the transcription evidence I had used to identify these themes was insufficient. The reason is that I made the error of already deciding on these two themes and then looked for extracts to justify that, rather than identifying the themes from the participants’ extracts. Further discussion and debate helped both my supervisor and I to realise that I may have been too frugal in my use of participant extracts for certain themes. We felt that the richness of the data was lost because of this. I thus went back and included longer extracts in the development of the specific themes, which meant I was able to capture far better the full meaning of what was said. Divergent cases and themes were also made clear to highlight contrasting views. I am thus confident that the themes that resulted from the analysis are sufficiently dense and well-supported by the extracts on which they are based, having gone through a rigorous process of iteration.

9.4.4 A good IPA study gives space for the elaboration of each theme

In the presentation of each theme and sub-theme, I took great care to include and discuss numerous extracts by each of the participants. In some cases, multiple quotes from the same participant were used to add depth or illustrate key points.

9.4.5 A good IPA study includes an interpretive analysis

I am confident that my analysis extends beyond that of mere description. I did this by considering the way in which language was used and what it might reflect. For example, I noted that one of the female participants, when talking about herself on board, referred to herself in the third person as *Mummy,* which is clearly the term her child uses for her. In contrast to this, she referred to herself in the first person when she described being at home. I was able to identify how this participant's identity as a mother potentially plays a role in her experience on board. Related to this point, I also noted dual meanings when they arose in the participants' extracts and offered a discussion on any ambiguities.

9.4.6 A good IPA study points to convergence and divergence

The participants' extracts were flooded with contrasts, with some components of a certain participant's account standing out as noticeably different from the others. This was pointed to in the results. For example, some of the male participants discussed the importance of banter on board, and how much they enjoy it. On the other hand, one of the female participants described having to support female cadets in managing banter on board and knowing when to report it as potential sexual harassment. This potentially highlighted the different experiences that the male and female participants have had on board. Many of the themes were considered not only in terms of the different elements they captured but also in terms of how they converged and acted together.

9.4.7 A good IPA study is carefully written

I have presented the themes and sub-themes in an order which is helpful to the reader and allows the experiences described by the participants to be related in a logical manner. I have carefully selected extracts owing to the clarity of their expression and richness of the data.

9.5 Reflexivity

Larkin and Thompson (2011) note that reflexivity in an IPA study is "an ongoing reflexive process, which runs right through the life of a project" (p.106). Therefore, a final reflexive statement is not needed as this occurred throughout the duration of the project in two ways. First, I used supervision sessions to discuss my own feelings and position in relation to the

research. I found the supervision sessions an integral part of validating my capability to engage in rigorous research. Second, the reflexive journal I kept throughout the two months of interviews provided me with a way of clarifying my thoughts and it often sparked off new insights as well, often to my surprise.

9.6 Limitations of the study

The seafarers in this study provided valuable information about their experiences and perspectives on well-being, occupational stress and mental health. However, there are limitations to this phenomenological study. As an English-speaking researcher working with second language speakers (Participant J, E and B whose first languages were Hindi, Afrikaans and French respectively) language barriers may have detracted from my ability to obtain rich descriptions from these participants. IPA is “an intensive, language-based approach” (Smith, 2011a, p. 12) and thus unavoidable limitations with regards to language differences need to be acknowledged. However, it must be noted that all three of these participants were comfortable speaking English as a second language, and English is the language of choice aboard the ships on which they work.

A second limitation is that the sample, while fairly diverse, failed to include participants from other typically seafaring nations, such as China, Japan and the Netherlands. There is a question if the sample included participants from these countries, would the results have changed, or would other well-being practices have emerged from the data? In addition to this, the participants, coincidently and through no intention of my own, were all officers. It is wondered whether seafarers at cadet level or ratings might have shared different experiences.

A third limitation is that all the participants in the study were officers. This was quite unintentional on my part – I simply chose 13 of the questionnaire respondents who had scores of 9 or above on the WPP, focusing only on gender. While this may have been coincidental, it might also hint to differences in levels of psychological well-being in officers and ratings. Could it be that officers feel they have higher levels of psychological well-being, perhaps because of better pay or status? Another factor at play could be the use of the Internet – do officers with higher rank (and pay) than ratings have better access to the Internet than ratings do? This limitation means that there certainly is scope for the same kind of study to be done using ratings as participants. It would be interesting to explore the extent to which experiences of PWB differ from each other with regards to the various grades of seafarer.

9.7 Recommendations for further research

The following areas are recommended for further research:

- Since the potential impact of a shipping career on identity was a novel finding, and has not been the subject of previous research, this could be explored.
- Identity management strategies that help seafarers to manage this could be explored more specifically.
- It is also recommended that research be conducted on the potential well-being practices of nations such as China, Japan, and the Netherlands, as this was a limitation to this study.
- The study could also be reproduced in cadets or ratings, as this study included only officers in its sample. It would be interesting to understand the experiences of cadets and ratings with regards to well-being and mental health.

9.8 Conclusion

I have come to the end of writing this thesis. Perhaps it is fitting to conclude with the sentiments of Ishmael, protagonist from Moby Dick. Ishmael notes that:

> *To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it (1988, p. 574).*

It feels, to be honest, like I have written a mighty book. This is not because of the hundreds of hours I have spent on this project, nor the few tears shed along the way. It is mighty because I chose a mighty theme. Seafarers are, as one of my participants noted, the *unseen and the unknown*. Yet because of them, we have access to global trade. Without them, global trade would come to a standstill. A glance around your living room at items such as your furniture, television and laptop will reveal the importance of seafarers and the role they play in our lives. This role truly is a mighty one, yet it is one of which many of us are not even aware. It is hoped that this thesis contributes to the psychological well-being of the men and women around the world who have dedicated their lives to this profession. Because of research like mine, may they look to the future and say, as Ishmael did after his three-year search for a giant whale named Moby Dick (Melville, 1988, p. 117):

> *"I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I'll go to it laughing".*

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ADDENDUM A: Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant

1. Summary:

This research study will examine factors that are related to the mental health and well-being of seafarers. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an online interview of one hour (and possibly a follow-up interview of maximum one hour) that asks about your well-being and mental health. The online platform to be used will be whatever is most convenient to you.

2. Your right to withdraw/discontinue:

You are free to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also skip any survey questions or group questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Withdrawing from the study will not impact your employment in any way.

4. Risks:

The questions that will be asked are fairly personal, but unlikely to cause anything more than mild embarrassment or minimal distress, which would be transient. It is unlikely that the survey will impact on your mental health, but it may cause you to become more aware of and therefore more concerned about your mental health or the mental health of others. If the research causes you to be concerned about your mental health, then you are welcome to contact [*seafarer crisis line available in current location*] for support.

3. Benefits:

Participation in this research study does not guarantee any benefits to you. However, possible benefits include the fact that you may learn something about how research studies are conducted, and you may learn something about this area of research (i.e., mental health and wellbeing of seafarers). You may also learn something about your own mental health or the mental health of those close to you. You will also be contributing to further insight and understanding into this issue that may help others. However, it is important to note that individual benefits from the study cannot be guaranteed.

4. Time commitment:

The interview will be arranged at a time and place convenient to you, during working hours, and will be approximately one hour and online. A follow up interview may be requested to clarify any findings and will also be arranged at a time and place convenient for you, during working hours.

5. Guarantee of Confidentiality:

- All data from this study will be kept from inappropriate disclosure and will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor. No data will be shared with your employer or colleagues.
- The interview will be recorded via video recording and shared only with the researcher, her supervisor, and the transcriber of the interviews. No one else will have access to the interview recordings.
- The transcriptions will be viewed only by the researcher and her supervisor, along with a transcriber from a transcription company which follows strict confidentiality guidelines.
- Data collected (recordings and transcriptions) will be kept in a locked file cabinet, separate from consent forms, and all materials will be destroyed after three years.
- It is important to note that the researcher is not interested in anyone's individual responses, only the average responses of everyone in the study. Information that has the potential to reveal the identity of any participants **will be disguised or not used.**
- What you say may be used in the study to substantiate and justify key findings. This will be in the form of extracts from the transcripts being quoted in the findings. You will not be referred to by name and **any identifying details, such as names of shipping companies or key incidents, will be omitted.**

6. Risks: The present research is designed to reduce the possibility of any negative experiences as a result of participation. Risks to participants are kept to a minimum. However, if your participation in this study causes you any concerns, anxiety, or distress, please contact [*seafarer crisis line available in current location*].

7. Researcher contact information: This research study is being conducted by Lauren Brown. The faculty supervisor is Professor Charles Young, Head of the Psychology Department at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. If you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the researchers through Professor Young on +27 (0) 46 603 8541 or c.young@ru.ac.za.

8. Results of the Study: Results in the form of an anonymised summary can be made available to you at the end of the study, if you indicate that you would like to receive this.

9. Personal Copy of Consent Form: You will be provided with a blank, unsigned copy of this consent form at the beginning of the study.

10. Verification of Adult Age: By signing below, you attest that you are 18 years old or older.

11. Verification of Informed Consent: By signing below, you are indicating that you have freely consented to participate in this research study.

PARTICIPANT'S FULL NAME: _____

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

OVERVIEW:

This research study run through Rhodes University will examine factors that are related to the mental health and well being of seafarers. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer survey questions about your wellness and mental health. You are free to discontinue your participation in this survey at any time without penalty. You may also skip any survey questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Withdrawing from the study will not impact your employment in any way.

DETAILS:

This brief survey will take you approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. There are 35 multiple choice style questions.

CONSENT:

The questions that are asked are fairly personal, but unlikely to cause anything more than mild embarrassment or minimal distress, which would be transient. It is unlikely that the survey will impact on your mental health, but it may cause you to become more aware of and therefore more concerned about your mental health or the mental health of others.

If the research causes you to be concerned about your mental health, then you are welcome to contact https://sailors-society.org/ for support. All data from this study will be kept from inappropriate disclosure and will be accessible only to the researcher. No data will be shared with your employer and your name will not be used in reporting of the data.

1. Verification of adult age: I attest that I am 18 years old or older. *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ YES
   - ◯ NO (If no, please do not complete this form).

2. Verification of informed consent: I attest that I have freely consented to participate in this survey. *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ YES
   - ◯ NO (If no, please do not complete this form).

3. I have taken part in a workplace intervention/training/workshop on mental health and/or well-being.

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ YES
- ◯ NO

4. Please indicate your country of nationality: *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Bangladesh
- ◯ China
- ◯ India
- ◯ Phillipines
- ◯ South Africa
- ◯ Sri Lanka
- ◯ Other: _____

5. What is your level of employment? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Master
- ◯ Officer
- ◯ Cadet
- ◯ Maritime student
- ◯ Other: _____

6. For how long have you been working as a seafarer? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Under one year
- ◯ One to three years
- ◯ Five to ten years
- ◯ Ten to fifteen years
- ◯ Over fifteen years

7. A. 1. How often do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your work-related goals?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

8. A. 2. At work, how often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

9. A. 3. In general, how would you say your health is?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Terrible	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Excellent

10. A. 4. At work, how often do you feel joyful?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

11. A. 5. To what extent do you receive help and support from coworkers when you need it?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

12. A. 6. At work, how often do you feel anxious/worried?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

13. A. 7. How often do you achieve important work goals you may have set for yourself?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

14. A. 8. In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do at work is valuable and worthwhile?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Completely

15. A. 9. At work, how often do you feel positive?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

16. A. 10. To what extent do you feel excited and interested in your work?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Completely

17. A. 11. How lonely do you feel at work?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

18. A. 12. How satisfied are you with your current physical health?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

19. A. 13. At work, how often do you feel angry?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

20. A. 14. To what extent do you feel appreciated by your coworkers?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

21. A. 15. How often are you able to handle your work-related responsibilities?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

22. A. 16. To what extent do you generally feel that you have a sense of direction in your work?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

23. A. 17 Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Terrible	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Excellent

24. A. 18. How satisfied are you with your professional relationships?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

25. A. 19. At work, how often do you feel sad?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

26. A. 20. At work, how often do you lost track of time while doing something you enjoy?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

27. A. 21. At work, to what extent do you feel contented?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

28. A. 22. Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are with your work?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

29. A. 23. To what extent is your work purposeful and meaningful?

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely

30. If you would be willing to participate in a one hour interview on an online platform of your choice (with a potential follow-up interview, also online) on your thoughts and experiences about well-being as a seafarer, please provide your emails address below for the researcher to contact you. This is completely voluntary. Withdrawal can be made at any time if you change your mind about participating.

_____

ADDENDUM C: Granting of ethical clearance

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where Leaders Learn

Human Ethics subcommittee
Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8055
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za

www.ru.ac.za/research/research/ethics
NHREC Registration no. REC-241114-045

07/09/2020

Lauren Natalie Brown

Email: g19b2865@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2020-1338-3557

Dear Prof Young

Title: A mixed-methods study on the impact of a workplace wellness intervention on seafarers.

Principal Investigator: Prof Charles Young

Collaborators: Miss Lauren Brown,

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC). Your Approval number is: 2020-1338-3557

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloging number allocated.

Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb

Chair: Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee, RU-HEC

cc: Mr. Siyanda Manqele - Ethics Coordinator