

# LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES

## Recreational boating in the UK

Personal narratives and boaters'  
perspectives

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NATURAL ENGLAND



**LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES (LIFE18 NAT/UK/000039)**  
*Reducing and Mitigating Erosion and Disturbance impacts  
affecting the Seabed.*

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## 1: Introduction

*So yeah, it's a very strange thing, sailing. It can be frustrating, you know. It can be completely non-remarkable. And it can be fantastic, all for reasons that you can't really explain. And you can do it all in one day. (P05)*

This report is the primary output from a project on the personal experiences of recreational boaters around the UK coast. It was conducted by myself (Rhys Madden)<sup>1</sup>, a postgraduate student in Anthropology, during a 3-month volunteer placement with Natural England. This placement ran from February-May 2021 and was under the supervision of Dr Emma Hinton, with wider support from the Natural England Social Science team. My placement was connected to Natural England's role in delivering 'LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES', an EU LIFE-funded project to reduce the impacts of erosion and disturbance on the seabed. One aim of ReMEDIES is to understand how recreational boating activities affect at-risk seagrass and maerl bed habitats, and to then identify ways of promoting changes to behaviour among recreational boaters. Research into the behavioural context of anchoring and mooring was already taking place when I started my volunteer placement (see Twigger-Ross et al. 2021). I therefore aimed to supplement that work by looking at recreational boating beyond these specific activities, with a wider consideration of how individuals think about boating, themselves, and their community.

How recreational boaters conceptualised these issues was explored through a mix of research methods, including interviews, a qualitative survey, and some participation in online groups. Throughout this report, interview participants are referred to by a unique code beginning with P (e.g. P01, P02), and survey respondents by a unique code beginning with S (e.g. S01, S02).

Because of limitations over time and scope, as well as the lack of a shared structure between open-ended interviews, this report does not try to make unanimous claims or absolute recommendations. It instead aims to highlight meaningful topics which emerged during the project, and to point towards areas for future research. To my knowledge there has been no qualitative study of this kind among recreational boaters in the UK. As such, this report is led by the interview and survey data, though wider literature is referred to within sections to place observations within a larger context.

In total, this report aims to provide initial insights into the lived experience of boaters in the UK. It is hoped that this will contribute to a rounded view of boaters, which may in turn support future communication or behavioural change efforts in being a success.

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<sup>1</sup> This report is written in the first-person to highlight how topics developed in a highly personal way, through conversations with participants and my involvement over time in online boating-related groups.

### 1.1: Interviews

The call for interview participants was purposefully disseminated in a limited way, due to the constraints on time and scope of this project. Initial participants were recruited through a Facebook group related to boating on a budget, as this seemed to be an active site of community involvement. These participants were generally older, male, and highly experienced boaters. To balance this, a further call for participants went to university clubs on the south coast, as they seemed likely to also have younger, female, and less experienced members. In total, I spoke to 11 recreational boaters between 18/02/21 and 15/04/21. Two of these (P01 and P11) were informal conversations for which participants did not complete a consent form, were not recorded, and were ultimately excluded from this research. The other nine participants all consented to recorded interviews held via video conferencing software.

The south coast was chosen to focus on areas of potential overlap with the wider ReMEDIES project, and particularly with the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) of Fal and Helford, Plymouth Sound and Estuaries, and Solent Maritime. However, participants were not excluded because of residence, and some lived far from the coast. For many, the south coast only formed a portion of their wider boating experience in the UK and abroad. Participants more generally had a wide range of experience with different kinds of recreational boating, though most focused upon sailing during interviews. One exception was P06, who was primarily a coastal rower despite also sailing. Participants are roughly grouped by age and gender below:

Age	Male	Female
~20	P09	P08, P10
30-40	P02, P04	P06
50+	P03, P05, P07	

Figure 1: Table of interview participants by age and gender.

Interviews lasted around one hour and were relaxed discussions on personal experiences and thoughts about boating. Due to the lack of prior literature, and the open-ended nature of this project, there was no set topic list. I generally tried to support the natural flow of conversations by asking follow-up questions that related to the topics raised by individual participants. However, each participant was prompted at some point to discuss how they became involved in boating, and their most memorable experiences. Participants were only interviewed once, except for P02 with whom a follow-up interview was conducted.

### 1.2: Survey

Following the completion of most interviews, a survey was developed to extend some of the topics that had been raised. This was hosted online between 14/04/21 and 01/05/21. It was disseminated in mid-April through boating-related Facebook groups which participants had recommended due to their involvement as

administrators. The survey involved open-text answers to qualitative questions on similar topics to the interviews.<sup>2</sup> There were 38 responses in total, with the majority of respondents answering most questions.

One specific question asked participants to submit an image which they found meaningful with regards to boating, and to further explain what was happening and why it was chosen. It was explained that these images would be used for research purposes, rather than dissemination, and so they have not been included in this report. 18 respondents submitted an image within their survey response, with one other submitting a video of dolphins playing at the bow wave while they sailed.

Keeping images secure may have supported the submission of private photographs like families at sea, for example, which were useful from a research perspective to see what people value about boating. However, many images were stunning and gave a real visual insight into why boating appeals to so many people, so it is perhaps a shame that they cannot be used in future communications or research dissemination. What this does show, however, is that there is a willingness to share images with researchers, which should encourage any future effort to recruit similar images with dissemination in mind.

Finally, two survey respondents (S15 and S28) were flagged as the same individual, who answered more than once to emphasise the value of Studland Bay as an anchorage. This relates to a pre-existing resistance among some boaters to the idea of anchoring restrictions at that location. These responses have been retained, with this caveat, as they were still deemed to be valuable and there was no quantitative analysis for duplication to disrupt.

### 1.3: Online groups

Through the course of disseminating the call for participants, I became a member of several boating-related Facebook groups. As such, where there appear to be overall trends in online discussions that can extend observations from surveys and interviews, this has been mentioned. However, any reference to particular interactions online would require a specific ethical review and a detailed data management plan. While that avenue has not been pursued in this case, it could provide a route for further research.

### 1.4: Data storage and access

Interview transcripts and survey responses are securely held by the Natural England Social Science team in line with the wider Life Recreation ReMEDIES privacy notice<sup>3</sup>. They will therefore be kept until 5 years after the end of the project, due in January 2024. Anonymised transcripts and survey responses will also be archived online and made available to other researchers in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a full list of survey questions.

<sup>3</sup> This is available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-england-privacy-notice/life-recreation-remedies-project-privacy-notice>

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## 2: Memorable Experiences

A key focus of this study was to better understand the *experience* of different kinds of recreational boating. Experience is a multi-faceted term, but one that can be useful in appreciating how different aspects of recreational boating are interlinked. When listening to participants' stories, and hearing them share their experiences, it was helpful to distinguish between three aspects: 1) What sorts of things happen; 2) How it makes people think and feel; and 3) What then becomes memorable or personally important.

Memorable experiences are a good place to begin, not because they are necessarily representative of regular trips, but because they may help reveal what participants find to be subjectively meaningful. That is to say, questions about memorable experiences can get to the nub of what people value, what motivates them, and how they think about themselves and their activity.

This section explores how participants' memorable experiences demonstrated an awareness of the ever-present potential for things to go wrong when boating. This in turn may suggest that the understanding and management of risk is an important criterion for self-identification as a competent boater. The potential for things to always go wrong has further consequences in understanding weather as a determining factor, particularly in sailing, and the way in which memorable experiences are often structured into moments rather than complete journeys.

### 2.1: Things going wrong

My expectation of memorable experiences was that they would be focused upon the overwhelmingly positive, or the distinct and unusual. For some participants this was part of the picture, and their most memorable experiences included almost fantastical descriptions of interactions with nature:

*This happened to me last year, you know, we were out, it was a calm night, we were barely sailing at all because there's no wind, full moon glinting off the water, and then we finished up with about 40 or 50 dolphins around the boat for an hour playing. You know, you don't experience that anywhere else. (P05)*

However, these same trips were often paired with intense moments of drama, stress, and potential catastrophe. Later in the conversation, P05 returned to the above story to add the following:

*Same trip as I said with the dolphins, that was on, the dolphins were on the way back from Holland. On the way to Holland, so about 10 days before that, we got caught in a completely un-forecasted, unforeseen storm, on the way over there, you know. Finished up in 50 knot winds, which is, you know, pushing towards Force 10. 30-foot waves and pretty nasty, you know. And you don't know it's coming, so you just, they hadn't forecast it, you've just got to deal with it, you know. Which, obviously, we did. (P05)*

A very similar story was given by another participant, reflecting upon a sailing trip to Ireland as a teenager where dolphins were riding the bow wave:

*I could see these animals in their natural habitat doing what they were doing. And for me that was magical, you know, experiencing that. And this is a regular occurrence now, but it wasn't at the time. And then for the next three days it was a force horrible gale, found we were puking our guts out all the way to Ireland. But, you know, it was an experience that I've, it sticks in my mind, massively. (P04)*

Although the above are relatively extreme examples, and draw from long voyages out at sea, they connect to a much more general recognition by participants that both positive and negative experiences can always coincide within a single journey. There was an active awareness displayed across interviews that boating always has the potential to go wrong. And when it does go wrong, as one participant put it, there can be a "chain reaction" (P05) that leads to things getting much worse very quickly. In the words of one survey respondent, boating is therefore most similar as an activity to flying:

*One moves through water and is at the mercy of weather and the tides. The other moves through the air and is at the mercy of the weather and the wind. Get either wrong in a big way and they will kill or injure you. (S04)*

A consequence of this is that memorable experiences can be those in which individuals face difficult situations but overcome them:

*I think my first memorable, most memorable experience, was when we went around Portland Bill, with my wife in the boat. And we actually got round there into Weymouth Harbour, which was a major voyage, we'd done about 60 miles. And the next day, we went up the coast to Lulworth Cove and we anchored there. And that I found was a fantastic achievement. And there were problems over, problems which happened like the battery was flat when I wanted to start the engine in the morning. And it was dark, because we had to leave then because that's when the tide was right. So I could start the engine on this boat with a handle. And because this boat at the time was small enough that I could light it with just one small paraffin lamp in the rigging. That was all I needed legally. And so we got away from there, went back, came back, we got around Portland bill, and I couldn't see anything. I could see the sea ahead of me. The shore was completely shrouded in fog. I'd done all my passage planning and made, plotted my course to go, and we had 50 miles across the sea. And the first thing I knew was that I*

*could just see Berry Head come through the clouds in front of me. And I knew I got it right.*

*That was quite an achievement. (P03)*

In the above case, as elsewhere, the reason why the experience was memorable is partly the sense of achievement that comes from having dealt with an unforeseen problem. Success, in the face of adversity, can be proof of ability, knowledge, and mindset. Often this is reactive, with a recognition of the tools required to get out of sticky situations. This element came across in memorable experiences but also in statements made by a couple of participants about their personal idols, as in the case of a local sailing hero:

*The sort of dangers and stuff she's got into and the scrapes she's got out of, and all that kind of stuff. And her, just her raw sailing ability. She's a tremendous sailor. (P07)*

However, the ability to deal with potentially difficult conditions can also be situated in the pre-emptive stages of planning and preparation. With P03's story above of heading around Portland Bill, the achievement seems primarily related to the moment when the prior passage planning and course plotting is proved to be spot on. An illuminating case was given by another participant who described how their most memorable experience was not anything obviously remarkable at all; it was a cold trip on New Years Day to move their boat to a new marina in Ipswich:

*"Nothing happened that was interesting, that was exciting. Nothing, nothing happened at all. But it was absolutely brilliant" (P05).*

Probing into why that trip felt so great, despite appearing so routine, the participant explained that the very fact it was so unremarkable was proof of all the successful prior planning. Although nothing markedly different happened, there was also nothing that worked against them. The sail had been planned so that the tides were with them the entire way, the wind direction as well:

*And all of that stuff, if it all comes together, like it did that day, you know, there can be a massive sort of feeling of achievement, that you've managed to plan that, and it's all gone exactly to plan. (P05)*

I mentioned elements of this story in other interviews, when asked about the sorts of things other people had said, and it was met with a chorus of agreement and understanding. There does seem to be a widespread recognition that boating always retains the possibility of things working against you. This means that memorable experiences can be those in which nothing particular happens, precisely because things could have become difficult. The reason why they did not is because of prior preparation and planning, which is then a testament to ability and expertise.

It is not only difficulties with the boat or with weather conditions that must be managed for journeys to be a success. One participant also mentioned it in terms of participation and teamwork when you are sailing with other people as crew. For P09, crewing alongside others could produce particularly impactful experiences:

*The big yachts is where you learn sort of more, these eye, have these more eye-opening experiences, because you're on a boat with a crew, with like-minded people. And you know, you can get along, you can't get along, and all of you have to sort of work together to have this one, you know, work together to produce this, you know, a safely sailing yacht. (P09)*

Even when nothing remarkable happens, reaching the point of sailing safely can be memorable because of the work involved in getting there together, with each person pulling their weight on board. Crew dynamics, like weather conditions, are perhaps an element that can cause problems if not appropriately managed. One participant touched on this when explaining a clear rule which he and his wife kept when taking others out on the water:

*When we're sailing, if the wind starts to get up, the first person that thinks or says out loud, 'Do you think we should reduce sail area?', it's not a point for discussion. As soon as somebody had that thought we do it. (P05)*

The above rule anticipates potential problems and tries to prevent them from occurring, like trying to change a sail in dangerous wind conditions. Sometimes, however, things are simply out of your control and there is nothing to do except wait it out. For a couple of participants, memorable experiences included moments when they could do nothing except trust in the boat to see them through a storm. In these conditions, facing up to massive waves and serious weather can impress upon participants an awe-inspiring sense of scale:

*We'd go out and rough weather or something, we could get caught in rough weather, and there'd be like huge waves. And it just, it puts everything into perspective. Because you're like 'Oh I'm, the sea is huge and I'm just like this little person'. (P10)*

These moments of losing control, although quite extreme, do point to a more general attitude expressed in interviews: One of the things which makes sailing enjoyable is feeling on the edge of control, aware that things can tip outside of your control so easily. This dynamic seems to be present in much smaller-scale moments too, like pushing a dinghy to the limit while racing, which will be discussed in the next section on felt experience. When there are so many potential factors that can stop you sailing well, simply getting everything right can be deeply affecting:

*It's an almost spiritual experience, when the boat is sailing and sailing well. It's just you, the wind, the sea. And it's all, none of it's under your control, but it's under your control, if you see what I mean. It's hard to explain, but when the boat heels over, it starts moving, moving really well, it's quite exciting. Even though you're only getting it going at five miles an hour. (P03)*

## 2.2: Risk management as expertise

One observation to come out of the above memorable experiences is that risk management—awareness, planning, and response—is an important part of how sailing expertise is conceptualised. Assessing the extent to which this attitude is universal would require further research. Some participants suggested that other people were perhaps not as aware or actively concerned with managing risks as they were themselves. I have also seen multiple conversations online where individuals bemoan other marine users who do not understand the potential risks, and thereby endanger themselves and others. In two interviews (P04 & P06), this was directly linked to people taking up coastal pursuits as a response to the constraints of Covid-19:

*If I told you, a family walked along the beach, unrelated to boating, but with a dog, and they got stuck in the mud, it took 160 people to work in close proximity with each other for a period of three or four hours. That's a significant risk that didn't need to happen. Now that relates to just walking along the beach, which everyone perceives as being absolutely fine. But what they didn't know, or what people don't know, is those people came from, I'll say London, I'm not picking on London, but I think they came from London to walk along a piece of coastline that they didn't know, and therefore the risk was greater. They didn't understand the risk. And they didn't manage the risk, because they didn't understand about tides. (P04)*

In the eyes of one respondent, an experienced male boater connected to the RNLI, the steps taken to manage risks do not have to be very large. A very relaxed and positive experience can be guaranteed through some simple measures:

*If they keep away from traffic, if they choose a good benign day, and they get the tides right, not much is going to go wrong with them. (P03)*

This may seem quite distanced from the memories of near-disaster mentioned previously, but it seems to share the same underlying logic: Recreational boating has the potential to go wrong, and a level of risk awareness and management is central to making it a success. The risks and the mitigating behaviours scale depending upon the size of the undertaking, but they still seem present.

Only one interview stood out for a different approach to risk—P08, a self-described novice boater who, despite only having been sailing a couple of times, had recently bought a boat to liveaboard with her equally novice partner:

*We're planning to do most of these things, like, by ourselves I guess, with the help of a lovely community, so I don't really have too many worries. No. Hitting a rock would be a bit shit but just got to avoid the rock! They're all, they're all marked with buoys and they're on all of the charts and whatnot. So, unless you get it really wrong, I don't know how bad it can be.*

What came out more in the interview than the transcript is that the participant had a very good-humoured attitude towards the uncertainty of the future, including the potential risks of sailing. She would quickly shift between joking about both potential disaster and their lack of preparedness to a much more serious tone when discussing practical matters. She had reached out extensively to people locally and online for advice, was working her way through a stack of sailing books to learn, and had a plan for developing competency through learning to sail locally in the “forgiving” waters of Falmouth before venturing further afield. The relaxed attitude towards risk seems more like a performed identity relating to other values like spontaneity, which more widely seemed to be part of her motivation to liveaboard. When it came to practical issues, however, she had a clear plan to identify and manage possible risks.

It might be that there genuinely are recreational boaters who do not see risk management as an important part of their practice, perhaps occasional boaters who rarely go on the water. This is hard to assess as research participants were generally highly involved in boating. What there is more evidence from this research to support is that the ability to understand and manage risk is a key value for many people involved in recreational boating, and a way in which they perceive themselves as having expertise. It is possible that there was a performative element to this in the interviews, with individuals purposefully presenting themselves as competent and experienced boaters. Even so, that would still suggest that participants believed risk management to be a recognised indicator of expertise.

What some of the above-given scenarios also highlight is the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Highly public debates around risk have been taking place over the last year, particularly to do with risks of transmission, of hospitalisation, and more recently of different variants and vaccines. Tangentially, debates over visiting boats despite travel restrictions seemed to be framed online through a similar language of risk and responsibility to boating more generally. Further research would be needed to assess whether there is a connection between the ways in which recreational boaters conceptualise their experience and the increased discourse around risk due to the global pandemic. A wider literature review could also distinguish

how this management of risk differs from that which has been described in other sports (see Bunn 2019, 2016; Ewert 2007).

### 2.3: Weather as determining factor

Although it may seem obvious, a second feature suggested by people's memorable experiences is the determining nature of the weather. Particularly with sailing, the variability of experience is a consequence of the changeability of the weather. Passages of calm sailing can be accompanied by long stretches of boredom or by sudden moments of stress, discussed in more detail in the next section. More widely, weather conditions and tides dictate what kinds of journeys are possible. This can be at the level of deciding where to go, as certain destinations become more accessible than others or particular planned trips are postponed to a better weather window. Adjusting to weather in this way can happen before setting sail, but it also occurs on the fly:

*Sometimes it will be a 'I'm going to go this direction and sort of see how time's going to decide when to stop'. There have been some occasions where it's been the case of going out and just finding that it's plain too uncomfortable to go the way I was thinking of going. (P02)*

Even when sailing in the same location, the weather can determine the kinds of activity that take place, as one participant described with dinghy sailing:

*It's fun when there's loads of wind, because it's so unpredictable. But there's also, it's also fun when there's no wind because you just lay around and sunbathe. (P09)*

It is worth clarifying that while weather determines what kinds of sailing are possible, its subjective effect is channelled by location, type of boat, and wider personal circumstances. A specific weather window, for example, only becomes a limitation because of external boundaries already in place, like the time booked off from work as holiday:

*We've done coastal stuff, we live on the east coast of the UK, so we've done a lot of coastal stuff. We've been across to Holland, we've, you know, we do, we do all sorts of stuff, whatever we feel like, you know. And whatever, more importantly, whatever time off work permits. Because the one key thing if you, you've got two weeks off of work, and you think 'Ah we'll go to Holland', the chances of the weather actually lining up with the two weeks that you've got are slim to none. So more often than not planned trips don't happen, or at least they don't happen in the way you want them to. (P05)*

Non-sailing responsibilities will always affect the time available and make planned trips vulnerable to weather conditions. Time off work may be less of a factor for older boaters who have taken retirement, but they too are likely to have other kinds of personal obligations that structure their availability. It could perhaps be further said that weather conditions are channelled again by people's level of experience, and the kinds of conditions they are confident in, but this is not something that was touched on much in interviews. It is however something I have seen in discussions online, particularly with regards to spending the night at anchor.

The conflict between planned time off work and unpredictable weather is possibly resolved by the pleasure many boat-owners take in simply spending time where their boat is kept, completing ongoing maintenance jobs and talking to others nearby. For some, like P04 and P05, this seems the solution if they have free time but conditions are inappropriate for sailing. This role of the boat as a place to meet others is discussed later in the section on community.

#### 2.4: Moments vs. entire journeys

The determining nature of the weather connects to an underlying point, that participants did not always think about memorable experiences in terms of whole journeys. Instead, it was often individual *moments* that stood out. This distinction was explicitly raised by one participant:

*(I)<sup>4</sup>: Does anything in terms of your background or experience sailing or boating stand out, as a particularly memorable experience?*

*(P06): They tend to be moments rather, for me. There might be, so, in my head, I can, sailing, coming back from Hamble to here, the wind was in the perfect direction, it was the perfect knot, the sails were set right, and it was just, you just have those moments when everything, it's a beautiful sail. You have moments when it's lumpy and memorable moments for the wrong reason too, and actually it's not that great, and the fog's come in and it's a bit scary. You always have that moment, certainly if you've been cruising out of the harbour and you come in. At Bosham we've got the church and it's quite a beautiful village when you come in. And when you see it you kind of 'Ah yeah', you're home, it's quite nice, no matter the size of the voyage you're desperate for a shower and a drink on land.*

The separation into discrete moments may come partly from the changing weather conditions which make sections of a single trip very different, as discussed earlier. But for many participants there seemed other natural ways in which a single journey could be subdivided, and between which the experience could differ

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<sup>4</sup> (I) here refer to the interviewer.

greatly. The clearest subdivisions here were between exiting a harbour, sailing out along the coast, and then returning into a harbour again. The types of activity possible at these different points vary, as do the stresses, like having to be more aware of other marine users and hazards when coming in to shore. Further research could perhaps benefit from asking participants to describe or draw their journey in more detail as the basis for discussion, allowing for a deeper analysis of how individuals structure trips into various stages.

#### 2.4.1 Survey findings

After observing a difference between moments and journeys in interviews, the survey purposefully followed up on this distinction. It asked separate questions about memorable journeys and distinctive or special moments *within* journeys. The majority of participants answered both questions, with most giving different kinds of answers.

Distinctive *moments* generally fell into two camps. The first were moments that were repeatable, such as the feeling of leaving from or arriving into harbours, dropping anchor, waking up at sea, even the moment when the engine is turned off and the sails are catching the wind. Some of these were small and private pleasures, like a simple cup of tea or welcoming dawn at the end of a night watch. The other kinds of moments were one-off events. These could be incredibly positive experiences, like encounters with dolphins or the sea 'alive with bioluminescence' during a night passage. But they could also be moments when disaster almost struck, like being caught in the eye of a storm or waking up in a shipping lane with a broken anchor rope.

Memorable *journeys*, by contrast, were more likely to include higher-order factors that ran through entire trips. This included the value of spending time with family or friends, regardless of what happened during the actual trip. Connected to this was the inclusion of more activities that occur off the boat, such as swimming while at anchor, visiting pubs or restaurants, or going on walks. This idea of company, and time spent not at sail, was much less present when asking about particular moments. Another aspect that stretched across multiple journeys, regardless of what happened during, was the beauty of certain coastal stretches or destinations, such as the Scilly Isles or the Isle of Wight. These areas were mentioned as abstract and general areas of natural beauty, the destination of repeat visits. Finally, certain trips were memorable because of something they meant for the participant's self-conception or self-development. This included the pride in completing a particular kind of journey for the first time, like a major crossing or a night passage, or journeys of unusual length.

#### 2.4.2 Anchoring

Given the importance of anchoring with care for seagrass and maerl habitats, it is worth highlighting how anchoring was depicted by respondents as a moment particularly loaded with meaning. For one individual answering the survey, the first moment of dropping anchor is when a holiday really begins, and the worries and stresses of regular life get released (S24). The act of anchoring can also come as a form of relief when

following a difficult sail or tough weather conditions, something a couple of respondents highlighted. This was potentially biased by respondents who were actively making the case for Studland Bay as a safe and valued anchorage, perhaps in line with worries over potential anchoring restrictions there (S15). But, more generally, the moment of anchoring appears to hold a lot of affective weight.

Feelings tied up with anchoring are not only positive, and discussions online seemed to show anchoring as a moment that some find tense and slightly nerve-racking. A light-hearted example of this can be seen in the comic below, created by cartoonist and cruising sailor Sarah Steenland. I first saw it shared in a social media group for boaters, where many people commented about recognising this feeling, some of whom also mentioned the stress of docking while communicating with a partner on board. Although an exaggeration, these kinds of responses, combined with the affective weight given to anchoring by respondents more generally, suggest that it is important to reflect upon what different people might be thinking and feeling during the moment of anchoring itself.

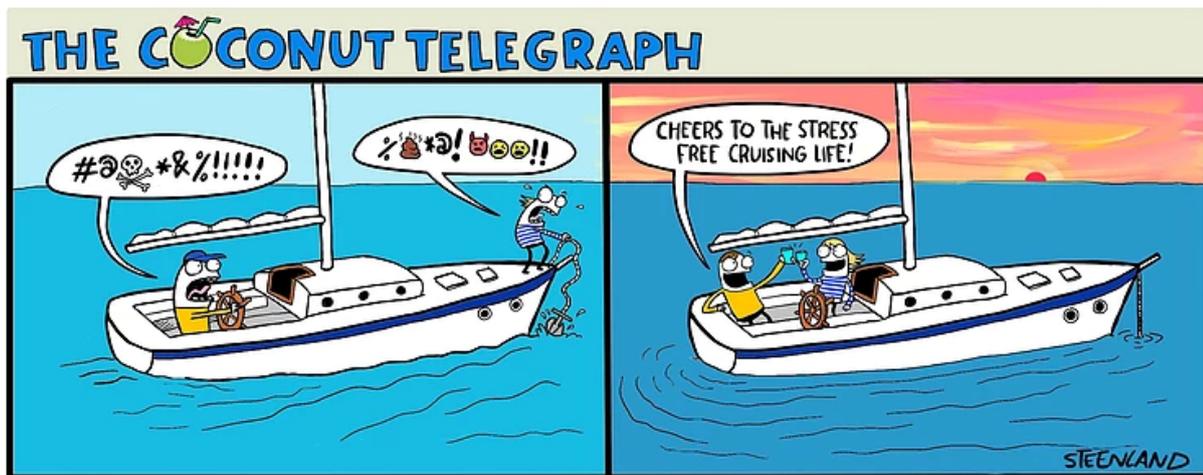


Figure 2: Cartoon on the stresses of anchoring. (Creator: Sarah Steenland, accessed on 13/07/21 at <https://www.sarahsteenland.com/>)

## 2.5: Discussion

Asking individuals about memorable experiences has produced a couple of interesting observations. The first is that the changeability of conditions features strongly in narratives. On the one hand, this may suggest that unpredictability is seen as a key aspect of boating in general and sailing in particular. On the other hand, it may be because learning to deal with change is a valued trait among boaters. This section has explored the latter idea through the idea of risk management and expertise, but it is a topic that the next section will extend further through the idea of mental awareness while on the water.

A second observation is that there may be a salient difference between talking about experiences in terms of moments or entire journeys. This could have consequences for how future communication and outreach is

conducted. Understanding how boaters feel at different moments, particularly when anchoring and mooring, could also be important for future efforts to promote behavioural change. Further research would be required to explore the extent to which these kinds of distinction are shared. In particular, targeted research would be needed on the viewpoint of individuals who primarily use motorboats, as participants referred almost exclusively to experiences that occurred while sailing. The way in which journeys are subdivided could also be investigated in greater detail, possibly by using creative methods like asking participants to draw timelines of trips.

While this section has focused on the experiences which strike participants as particularly memorable, little has been explored in terms of how events come to form part of meaningful narratives over time. One participant (P07) described how boring stretches when deep at sea were the times when he thought back upon previous moments of heightened activity and tried to make sense of what had occurred. Identifying the processes by which other individuals make sense of their experiences could be interesting. For example, further research could investigate the ways in which boaters share stories with one another, including the places where this might take place like the sailing club or through online groups. If there are shared norms around what it means to be a boater, it could be in these sorts of settings that they come into view.

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### 3: Felt Experience

A central motivation of this project was understanding what boating feels like for participants, as mentioned at the start of the previous section. This can be separated into both physical and mental aspects, although the two do overlap. Later sections will consider some of the higher-order values which people give for their involvement in boating, such as the development of self-resilience or the opportunity to be part of a community. However, being a boater, at its core, means going boating in some way or another, having an experience in a boat on the water, and returning to do the same again in the future. Exploring what it feels like to do this may seem obvious but is important to understanding why boaters do what they do.

The sensory and mental aspects of water-based sports have been identified by several researchers who have reflected upon their own personal experiences at sea. In her recollection of windsurfing off Southampton Water, researcher Barbara Humberstone describes what she feels, sees and smells:

*I feel the water rushing past my feet and legs. The wind in my hair.*

*I sense the wind shifts in strength and direction and move my body in anticipation to the wind and the waves. I feel the power of the wind and the ability of my body to work with the wind and the waves. The delight and sensation when surfing down a small wave with the sail beautifully balanced by the wind.*

*Seeing the sea birds and the fish jump delight further.*

*The smell of salt and mud.*

*The small seal that made its home on the tiny pebble spit.*

*These are some of the beauties of windsurfing in this liminal space even with a monstrous power station chimney hovering in the distance and the occasional smell of sulphur from the large oil refinery when the wind blows from the north east.*

*(Humberstone 2011:502)*

The experience of the body and mind, in a dynamic relationship to the surrounding environment, is highlighted by Humberstone and others as being at the centre of activities like coastal boating (see also Brown 2017, Broch 2020). This section therefore begins with a look at sensory experience before turning inwards to ways of thinking while boating. Where participants mentioned differences between types of boating this is discussed at the end, with variations in experience presenting an opportunity for further targeted research. Overall, both sensory and mental aspects seem to be used by boaters to distinguish their experiences on the water from wider life.

### 3.1: Sights, sounds and physical feelings

For many individuals, boating was seen to provide uniquely amazing sights and spectacular views. This includes the chance to view nature, with sightings of dolphins, whales and seabirds, as well as the night sea “alive with bioluminescence” (S06). It also includes the sunrises that punctuate early morning voyages and the welcome sunset after a day at sea. Sunrise and sunset were mentioned in many survey responses and featured in over a quarter of the images submitted by respondents as ‘meaningful’ (S05; S12; S13; S17; S29; S37). A few of these images place their subjects in the centre of these displays of light and colour, with boats and boaters silhouetted against the sea and the sky.

Following from the above, it is perhaps useful to think about what boaters see in terms of ‘perspective’, a word which was used by a few individuals (S04; S37; P09). Perspective seems apt for the way it includes the things that are seen, the position of the viewer to allow for those sights, and an accompanying way of thinking. These were combined in the enjoyment which some boaters felt when “out of sight of land” (P05) or in looking at starlit skies while far out at sea:

*Some of the things that you see, when you're out there, you know - even a person that lives in the middle of nowhere on land will never see a starry night like you'll see in the middle of the sea. (P05)*

As well as looking up to the sky, or out to the sea, some boaters valued the different perspective they gained of the coastline. For P06 there was an immense pleasure in observing how the coast was continually changing with the tides. For S37 the value lay in gaining a unique perspective on “familiar places”, and P04 similarly enjoyed how sailing “makes you look at the geography of the area differently”. This ability to disrupt previous ways of seeing was also mentioned by P09, who described how the view from the sea revealed the UK to be beautiful in a way that standing on land could not:

*It's also a perspective of the UK that many people haven't seen, because they're on it rather than looking at it. But yeah, seeing it from the sea is pretty incredible. Because you don't really know the UK to be a country of serene amazing beauty. It's not, it's not usually in all of these travel photographs. But it's pretty incredible when you see it from the sea. (P09)*

Another valued way of observing the coast was in how areas opened up and revealed themselves on approach. Sailing around a headland into a bay, or through a narrow break in the rocks into a cove like Lulworth (P09), could suddenly present a new view to those on board and provide a visually arresting experience. Seeing the coastline change was therefore valued through multiple trips over different seasons and tidal conditions, but also through the dynamic perspective of a single voyage.

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Ideas of separation and distance from land were also expressed through sound. In particular, peace and quiet were mentioned by many respondents as unique qualities offered to them by boating (S07; S12; S15; S19; S25; S26). This could include the quietness provided by a secluded anchorage (S13; S24) or by sailing out and away from busy places (P04). The idea of quiet referred equally to the absence of noise and to the lack of people, traffic, and the general hustle and bustle of wider life. The overlap in interpretation highlights how sound is about much more than just volume. Different sounds are loaded with meaning, so that some are experienced as unwanted noise while others are tied into positive feelings.

An example of the above is how multiple individuals highlighted the moment of turning the engine off and making way solely under sail:

*The moment when you turn the engine off is always a good one. And you just have that, you then just have the noise of the boat through the water, and a bit of the wind, basically. (P02b)*

While there can be an enjoyment in the reduction of noise, turning the engine off also marks the transition to a new part of the journey, one where actually sailing becomes possible. The lower noise levels also mean that the boater can be more aware of themselves and their surroundings (P03), including being able to hear how well the boat is sailing (P06). This is only one example of the soundscapes that boating can produce. The academic and sailor Mike Brown, for example, writes about the “groaning and grumbling” (2017: 687) of his boat during a night at sea. P08 similarly describes the “shrill whistle” of the wind running through the rigging at the boat yard in winter, a noise she was worried about living alongside.

Physical feeling, like sound, could also help boaters to know how well they were travelling through the water. A couple of participants explained that they could feel how the boat was responding, from the pleasure of gliding across the water with the help of wind, tide, and timing in the case of coastal rowing (P06), to the “sluggish” drag of the boat when its hull needed a clean (P03). For one participant, the exertion of sailing was also highly valued, with “physical labour” like pulling up sails being part of what made experiences distinct (P09). Similarly, one survey respondent fondly remembered “arriving exhausted and docking like a pro” after a long passage to Weymouth (S32). As well as physical exhaustion, some stories highlighted the intense cold of sailing in winter (P05) and of waking before sunrise at sea:

*We were on two watches, so you're on for four hours and asleep for four hours (P: Laughs). But it was, it was so, we were so cold, and then the sun started coming up... And it was just like, it was freezing, and it was, it was not that nice an experience. But looking back at it it's pretty amazing. (P09)*

If different sights and sounds help to separate the experience of being at sea from being on land, then physical feeling is a way in which boaters can embody this difference. This relates to an idea discussed by some researchers who have reflected on their own time at sea: A voyage is a liminal experience in which you are separated from regular life (see Varley 2011), with that sense of separation acutely felt within the body (see Humberstone 2011). As above, this could be through physical exertion or by being “cold and wet” (S10) on the water. It might also be felt through seasickness. For example, P07 related how the physical feeling of being seasick was a process he went through when transitioning to being at sea:

*I'll get very, very seasick, but only for a few hours and then I'd be fine afterwards. And you get such a, it's a weird, weird, it's almost like the adrenaline rush from running and stuff, I guess. After you've been seasick, you actually feel great. You know, and it's, it's sort of, it just sort of builds the whole thing into your system, and you, you get addicted to it. (P07)*

In a 2017 paper, Brown similarly writes that seasickness can be a process of becoming attuned to the sea, something it takes your body time to get used to. It is an embodied feeling of giving up control and recognising the primacy of the natural environment: “I am required to serve my apprenticeship anew, to be patient, and allow my bodily perceptions to align with the new reality” (Brown 2017: 689). This is not to say that seasickness has the same meaning for everyone. P02, the only other participant to mention seasickness directly, explained it as something caused by certain sensory experiences but usually (and gladly) avoided. The wider point here is that sights, sounds and physical feelings are all markers which individuals use in differentiating their experience on the water from regular life.

### 3.2: Immediacy, attunement, and calm

As well as the sensory aspects of boating, participants described a number of mental requirements and effects. In some cases the physical and mental were seen to distinctly overlap. P09, for example, explained how “the mindful side of it comes from the physical side”, combining to produce an “enriching psychological experience”. One way in which this could occur was in the need to move and act quickly in response to changes while boating. The immediacy of sailing, in particular, was expressed by P10:

*Because there's so many things you need to be thinking about at one time, you don't have time to be thinking about other things. Like, everything on a boat is so changing all the time. Like, like the wind changes, or like, there'll be a gust of wind come and that makes the boat tip over, or you'll have to turn the boat, like through the wind or, like, especially when you're racing, like you have to move out people's way and like tactics and things like that. (P10)*

For P10, a consequence of having to pay attention to constant change was not being able to think about other things. Elsewhere she credited this with helping her to forget about stresses in wider life, particularly her university work. P09 similarly described sailing as providing a “detachment” from the rest of the world, as the focus required to sail takes your mind off other things. These descriptions are similar to what some commentators have analysed as ‘flow’, with total focus and immersion in an activity. However, Humberstone (2011:505) argues that this concept is insufficient for understanding the nexus of nature, body, and emotion in nature-based sports, and prefers to think in terms of “spiritual experiences”, a description which was also given by one participant to describe the feeling of sailing well (P03).

The way in which conditions could change during a voyage was also seen to produce a specific way of thinking. P07 described this in deep sea sailing: Being relaxed while nothing much seemed to be happening but maintaining a constant awareness in case something changed. For P09, the way in which your mindset depended upon the conditions underpinned the ability sailing has to attune you to the environment:

*I think, the way, the way sailing makes you feel is usually dictated on what the weather's doing. So I think it kind of puts you in tune with the, with the environment and the world itself. (P09)*

One way in which boating was seen to require a total attention and focus was through “being on the edge” of control (P03). This was particularly the case with sailing, where toeing the line between being in and out of control produced the “buzz” of adrenaline and excitement for both P03 and P09. This connects to the wider perception, expressed by some participants and respondents, that “the wind is in control, you have to harness its power” (S02).

However, many individuals also referred to the slower experiences which boating could provide, and the feelings of calm and connectedness this generates. The idea of being slowed by boating to live in the moment was referenced by one survey respondent (S03), as well as most participants at various times. This was particularly the case when sailing deep at sea, where the wind might disappear but there was no need to motor on instead:

*And again, it's nice if you're not in a hurry, if the wind drops, and you just bob around for six or eight hours, who cares? You know, you don't need to start the engine and, you know, start, you know, making a noise. Just relax, just, you know, drink tea and watch the world, well, not go by. (P05)*

Smaller moments of calm were mentioned by other participants too, like P04 who described the “clearing of your mind” when sitting on the bow with a cup of tea, as the boat moved gently at sail. That both P04 and P05’s descriptions involve a cup of tea is not unique, with two survey respondents also referring to it in the

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context of enjoyable moments (S10) and boating as more relaxing than other high-adrenaline activities (S04). Being able to boil a kettle was also a way in which P06 distinguished between different types of boating, describing it as one of those comforts that contribute to her preference for larger boats over sailing dinghies.

### 3.3: Differences between types of boating

Beyond the ability to have a cup of tea, the type of boating was more generally seen to determine the mental and physical experience on offer. One distinction was between deep sea and coastal sailing. P03 explained how being deep at sea could be quite boring—“if there’s nothing happening, it’s just sea” (P03)—whereas leaving and entering a harbour were the exciting parts in which you had to pay attention. P07 referenced the same distinction, but personally experienced the deep-sea moments as “Zen-like” whereas being close to shore could be very stressful. This was given a further inflection by P05, whose deep-keeled boat required three or four metres of water depth for him to feel safe, meaning he found coastal sailing much more stressful than being farther out to sea.

Another point of difference was between the type of boat itself. Dinghy sailing, for example, was seen by P07 as being more immediate than other forms. It required a constant attention to avoid capsizing, whereas larger boats could absorb some changes and sort themselves out to a certain extent. Similarly, P03 believed that dinghies pushed the element of being on the edge of control to a further extent than any other kind of boating, especially power boats. Yet, even if they were more in control, power boats could still be extremely exhilarating (P09), a point that is also obvious in discussions I have seen by powerboat owners online.

One final difference came from how types of boat dealt with various weather conditions. For example, P03 described trying to get around headlands like Start Point in Devon when the wind and tide are against one another, throwing up large waves. This was seen as much more difficult in a motorboat than when sailing:

*Because you get thrown around a lot more, you don't have the stability. There's a certain stability with the rig and the sails, which means you don't get knocked about quite so much. It's hard to explain, but once you the boat's tipped over with the wind, it's got a degree of stability because of that. (P03)*

By contrast, P02 highlighted how boat owners who were willing to extensively use their motor gained a degree of security from the weather conditions over those who were committed to sailing. The mental and physical experiences of boating were therefore seen to be contingent on the type of boat, the type of journey, and the surrounding conditions, with each of these factors mutually affecting one another.

### 3.4: Discussion

Taking all the above into account, many boaters separate their experiences on the water as distinctly different from wider life. This can be through sensory means, with the unique sights, sounds and feelings of being out at sea. It can also be through the different ways of thinking that boating generates. While this can depend on the conditions and type of journey, with moments of calm as well as times of intense focus, the shared difference from usual patterns of thought helps to mark boating as something distinct.

Another interesting connection is how some participants saw boating as a process of attunement to the environment. Again this can be mental, with the awareness of changing conditions, but also physical, like feeling the boat move through the water and hearing it sailing well. As in the research of Humberstone (2011) on nature-based sports, the mind, body, boat, and surrounding environment seem to be in constant communication.

The above descriptions have been weighted heavily towards sailing, and further research could benefit from exploring similar ideas among a range of motorboats. It seems likely, for example, that high-performance powerboat owners may have a different relationship to exhilaration and the idea of being on the edge, or to the different soundscapes of boating. By contrast, some motor cruisers may share similarities in terms of observing the coast and accessing places that are quiet and calm.

Moreover, this research rarely asked participants about sensory experiences in a direct manner.

Observations were generally taken from wider stories and conversations, as well as diverse survey responses. Future research could specifically ask participants to describe (or even record) the sensory aspects of boating, as well as how they are feeling and thinking when out at sea. This could be useful for understanding what is going through boaters' minds when they are in places where seagrass and maerl are present, for example. It could also more generally identify concepts that are meaningful for boaters and potentially useful in future communication.

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## 4: Freedom

Throughout both the survey and the interviews conducted for this report, 'freedom' was regularly invoked by participants in explaining what boating offered as an activity and what boating is like as an experience. When asked "What does boating offer you that nothing else does?", 12 out of 38 survey respondents directly referenced 'freedom' in their open-text answer. Half of the interview participants also mentioned it in an unprompted way during conversation. Beyond these explicit mentions of 'freedom', many clustered or overlapping attributes were more generally mentioned in surveys and interviews.

The importance of 'freedom' to recreational boaters suggested by this prominence is consistent with the findings of Twigger-Ross et al. in their 2021 report on 'Understanding the Behavioural Context' of anchoring and mooring. There, 'freedom' was conceptualised as the ability to choose where to go and to visit favoured places. As such, 'freedom' was also specifically related to the ability to choose a place to anchor, and to not be restricted to mooring locations. Freedom as access, however, is only one kind of conceptualisation, and may have been emphasised by the report's focused attention to issues around anchoring, mooring, and especially Voluntary No Anchor Zones (VNAZs).

In the research conducted for this present report, freedom was seen to mean different things to different people. At the same time, individual participants often referred to it in multiple different ways. This sort of multiplicity has been commented upon by Caroline Humphreys (2007), who describes overlapping notions of freedom in Russia, and more recently by Loretta Leng Tak Lou (2019), who analyses the different kinds of freedom aimed at by social activists in Hong Kong. Both researchers demonstrate how various notions of 'freedom' are rooted in specific social and historic contexts. Different kinds of freedom were also mentioned in a sailing context by Barbara Koth (2013:148), with the 'positive' freedom of self-determination and autonomous control being more important than 'negative' freedom from constraining structures.

There has not been time in this project to explore the potentially deep histories behind ways in which 'freedom' is understood. A wider study could investigate the historical roots of boating cultures in the UK, including multi-generational boating families, the maritime histories of particular coastal places, and the way in which particular norms or values have become associated with boating over time. Kirsti Gurholt (2008) gives an example of the latter in her analysis of how the Norwegian outdoor ideal of *friluftsliv* – a sort of simple way of life in line with nature – came out of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century efforts to build a national identity. It then further developed into a gendered expectation for boys to develop self-sufficiency through learning in nature, which continues to be relevant today. A similar critical genealogy of norms and values around recreational boating in the UK has, to my knowledge, not yet been completed.

It has however been possible to identify some broad categories under which freedom was understood by participants during this research project. The rest of this section explores freedom as: 1) a felt experience; 2)

a counter to wider economic constraints; 3) the ability to self-determine; and 4) a lack of regulation. Distinguishing these different ways in which 'freedom' is understood may be important to achieve the possible intervention suggested by Twigger-Ross et al. (2021)—appealing to the “freedom narrative” as a means of changing recreational boaters' behaviour.

#### 4.1: Felt experience

For a couple of interview participants, 'freedom' was explicitly described as a feeling. For P10, this feeling was connected to exhilaration, but separate enough to be distinguished:

*And my absolute favourite thing, and it like brings a smile, it's crazy but it brings a smile to my face every time, is when I'm like sat on the boat and we're like planing across the water. It's just, I can't describe it. But it's like, you feel, for one you feel very free. And two, I don't know, it's exhilarating, like when you go really fast as well. (P10)*

That the sense of 'freedom' occurs when planing across the water suggests it may be connected, as discussed previously, to the feeling of the boat on the water, specifically the speed and lack of drag or resistance. The idea that physical sensation can support higher-level feelings of 'freedom', within certain contexts, was shared by P09 in a very different story focused on extreme discomfort:

*I was trying to sleep in my bunk and, you know, you go up on waves, like trying to sleep on a rollercoaster. But it's out of those like sort of moments of, that are really uncomfortable, you realize those are actually the moments you sort of enjoy the most and you look back on. They're the most memorable. And it's sort of, I don't think I've made many memories sort of like that where I've maybe been uncomfortable but sort of felt, you know, more alive, and more freedom, anywhere else. (P09)*

What seems to connect both this and the experience of P10 is the *intensity* of felt experience. Regardless of whether this is positive or negative it marks out that moment as outside of what is usually felt.

Understanding freedom as the experience of something outside of what is usually felt seems like a productive way forwards, as it helps connect the above to wider responses, particularly around ideas of peace, quiet and solitude. For some survey respondents, boating seemed to offer a feeling of freedom through these sorts of difference from everyday life:

*(Q: What does boating offer you that nothing else does?)*

*Boating slows me to live in the moment, it's my freedom and place of peace in the world.*

*(S03)*

*Freedom, peace and quiet. (S15)*

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*Space, peace, freedom & contentment. (S17)*

*Freedom away from busy life. Fresh air. Happy children on beaches or crabbing on  
harbour pontoons. (S22)*

By providing feelings of exhilaration or calm which are different from those felt during regular life, boating can more generally represent a freedom from life's wider constraints. This was most clearly suggested by P09, who explains how through these experiences he came over time to see sailing as more than just a "normal sport", and instead as "a medium that can help you feel a bit of freedom in a world where you have to work a nine to five job".

#### 4.2: Economic freedom

One way in which boating was seen to break from the constraints of normal life was in offering a kind of economic freedom through boat ownership. This may seem contradictory, even to some boaters, as the cost of keeping and maintaining a boat is a constant issue. One participant highlighted how people call boat ownership a "trap", the opposite of a freeing experience, as they buy a cheap boat and then get caught out by expensive repairs (P04). An example of this was the hidden cost of taking the boat out of the water to be surveyed for insurance, even if insurance itself is not that expensive. Another participant quoted an adage that I have also seen shared online, that the two best days of owning a boat are the day you buy it and the day you sell it on (P09).

Despite these concerns over maintenance costs, a few participants clearly indicated that boat ownership provided them with either an existing or a hoped-for freedom from wider economic constraints. This was most clearly expressed by P08, a woman in her early 20s who had recently bought a boat to live aboard on the South Coast with her partner. Major motivations for this decision were the "extortionate" cost of housing, the difficulty for young people to get on the housing ladder, and the desire to remain living by the coast, with which she had fallen in love. It was also a decision influenced by the changing nature of work as both her and her partner could work remotely, removing the need to be tied to a specific location. The roots of this decision seemed to run deeper however, as P08 actively referred to her own parents' story as an inspiration:

*She (my mother) grew up in like proper urban Manchester, and read 'Far from the Madding Crowd', and decided to run away to Wales, and met my dad and it was all romantic, cute, and then they just set this life up for themselves where they have never worked for anybody. And yeah, like they've just done exactly as they wanted. (P08)*

By being primarily a one-off upfront cost, boat ownership offered P08 a way to create a life like her parents, where she was not tied into certain kinds of work just to pay bills. The freedom from rent thereby supported

other kinds of freedom to travel and explore different places, and to work only how and when she desired. This understanding was by no means shared among all participants: P09, a university student of similar age, would rather the financial security of investing in a house, even if boating offered a feeling of freedom compared to a 9-5 job. P02 similarly explained that he wanted the economic security of a house, though he did “see the advantage of those friends of mine who have their lives contained on a boat, and the additional freedom that gives them.” In this situation, mobility and financial security seem opposed to one another, whereas those same factors coincided in P08’s decision to live aboard. This difference highlights the importance of understanding individual circumstances and deeper attitudes towards what economic freedom and boat ownership might mean.

Ideas related to economic freedom are not only relevant to liveaboard boaters. In a less extreme way, other respondents also highlighted how the initial cost of boat ownership then allows them to take trips when or where they want. P04, a married man in his mid-30s with a young son, explained how owning a boat means they can easily go for two weeks on holiday to Cornwall and have an enjoyable time for little cost. Moreover, by living near where the boat is moored, they can go sailing every afternoon in the summer, and in doing so easily replicate what is for many people a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience. The initial investment therefore creates a feeling of freedom through how regularly and spontaneously they can do what would otherwise be prohibitively expensive or difficult.

Finally, while some participants did talk about boat ownership in terms of its economic value, it is also important to realise that boating can disrupt that equation through the unique *quality* of experience it is seen to offer:

*“Boating, for the amount of money you spend, increases your value added to life significantly... for every pound you spend on boating, I think you get 100 pounds back in in experience.” (P04)*

#### 4.3: Self-determination

A third way in which freedom was conceptualised by participants was as the ability to self-determine. In an abstract sense this links to the economic freedom mentioned above, as boat ownership allows for control over decisions like when and how you visit some place or take time for leisure activities. However, there was also a much more specific understanding of freedom being the ability to make decisions when actually sailing. This came out most clearly in the discussion by P04 over the choices which are open to his son while in control of a dinghy:

*Yeah, thinking about the freedom, I don't know what age you were when you sailed a Pico but for my seven year old, he, it's his first experience other than a bicycle of being in*

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*control of something and almost, without sounding too epic, choosing his destiny. Where is he going to go? You know, it's only a sail around the harbour. But does he go straight on? Does he go right? Does he go left? Does he go and look at something? Does he go and investigate something? And he's in control of a vehicle really. And he can go and experience those things. (P04)*

Although the above participant recognises the exaggeration of “choosing his destiny” when sailing around a harbour, it does highlight an important point. In a variety of ways, from buying a boat for retirement (P05), as a family project (P07), or as a future home (P08), a boat purchase is often a commitment to a hoped-for future. P08 expressed this as the “freedom to sculpture life to how you want it to be”. This is self-determination in a very broad sense, in that freedom is related to the ability boats have for changing the way in which you live in the world.

More specifically, the freedom to decide where and when to go was valued by adults as well. P05, a male participant nearing retirement, explained that sailing appeals to him because it is all on his own terms. Particularly on a longer cruising trip, he can decide what pace to go and which destinations are of interest. During the journey he can also change to move off from places that are not as nice as expected, or to stay longer in those that are enjoyable. With his retirement plan to spend a few years cruising around the Mediterranean and other destinations, including the UK, the ability to choose and change the journey is one of the most important attributes of sailing.

This conceptualisation of freedom is quite closely related to that identified by Twigger-Ross et al. (2021), where boaters expressed a desire to choose where to anchor. However, the suggestion from this current research might be that the importance of choice is not necessarily about having open access to every location, but also about having the ability to plan and adapt a journey. In other words, the freedom to choose could be equally about internal features, such as the innate flexibility of boating and the ability of a boater to make decisions while on the water, as it is about external limitations of the coastline, such as No Anchor Zones (NAZs). While this would require further research it is perhaps supported by the recognition, for instance by P02, that specific coastal areas can still offer a lot of freedom “in terms of deciding where you go”, despite a range of immutable natural constraints.

#### **4.4: Lack of regulation**

A final way in which freedom was conceptualised by participants was as a lack of regulation. Again, this relates to the point made by Twigger-Ross et al. in their 2021 report around freedom of access to particular locations, and potential resistance to NAZs. However, this current research suggests that ideas about freedom as a lack of regulation may extend beyond the issue of access, and be worth considering in a broader way. Perhaps as expected, the strongest opinion on freedom as lack of regulation came from P08,

who had recently made the decision to live aboard her boat. She connected the freedom of boating to a lack of regulation and, by extension, a level of anonymity or freedom from being overly observed:

*And I just think the freedom. I love the fact that there are virtually no laws. I am sick of surveillance and everyone knowing exactly what you're doing all of the time. There's none of that with a boat! Like, you know when you buy a car and you have a V5, you don't have that with a boat. You don't have anything, nobody knows where you are or what you're doing.*

A similar response was given to the survey by two respondents (S15 & S28) who, as mentioned previously, appear to be the same person with a pre-existing frustration over Studland Bay. In their fuller answer (S28) they explain that boating offers “Freedom with very few regulations and rules.” They go on to state that a big attraction to sailing is that it does not require a license and yet is safer than activities approved by “so called experts”. While this is an opinion I have often seen stated online, there are also occasional posts which call for the introduction of a license requirement. This is usually in response to what some perceive as an increased uptake in boating by many who do not have the appropriate skills or knowledge to be safe on the water, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One way in which boating was seen as free from various regulations was in the ability to travel easily to other countries. P08, while yet to undertake a Channel crossing, nonetheless valued the idea that it could be done with few controls, though she was not entirely sure whether you would even need a passport. A similar point was made by P10, a university student, who reflected upon the first time she sailed to France with her family and the sense of freedom that provided. In her description she exaggerates the simplicity of sailing in contrast to the kinds of experience it can offer:

*I just think it's so cool that you can...like the freedom you have with it. You can go anywhere, just with a bit of wind, and a boat that floats. You know?*

The romanticism of getting afloat in a simple manner, and by doing so opening a range of potential experiences, is shared among many groups I have seen online. However, it is not all plain sailing. P05, who planned for a retirement of sailing around the Mediterranean, was frustrated by the increased regulation that had come into place as a result of Brexit. Compared to people doing the same journey even a year before, the EU travel restrictions turned the planned trip into “a logistical nightmare”. I have elsewhere seen this issue, and other kinds of historically increased regulations like limits over anti-foul paints, discussed online. Further targeted research, both historical and in conversation with boaters, could identify whether there is a more general feeling of increasing regulation, from where it might stem, and if it relates to more specific concerns like NAZs.

#### 4.5: Discussion

The above description of different kinds of freedom show that understandings can vary with individual circumstances and in relation to participants' personal life histories. They can also differ between kinds of boating activities, which for many participants overlap. The exhilaration when pushing a sailing dinghy to the edge, for example, may be very different from the quiet gained from travelling a significant distance away from other marine users in a yacht. While they can both replicate some parts of the others' action, they inevitably support certain types of experience. Many boaters have experience with both and with other kinds of water-based activities as well, including powerboating or paddle-boarding. They may also have their own financial situation to consider, issues around boat ownership or access, and contact with various aspects of external regulation. Each of these issues and experiences can be framed in terms of 'freedom' and can be conflated by the term.

This section reflected upon 'freedom' as a term spontaneously mentioned by boaters in their wider responses. Future research could benefit from intentionally exploring its roots and its understanding among boaters, including how it varies and how it comes to develop as a way of framing experience. This could involve directly asking participants about 'freedom' in recreational boating, and what it might mean to them. It could also include a historical analysis in a way similar to that of Gurholt (2008), mentioned at the beginning of this section.

Targeted research on this topic would be especially valuable in suggesting ways of communicating about VNAZs or suggested changes to anchoring and mooring more widely. The role of self-determination in some concepts of freedom suggests that empowering boaters to make their own decisions, through the provision of clear and accurate maps of seagrass locations for instance, would likely be important. There may also be an opportunity to tie environmentally friendly behaviours into the language of self-determination and the hopes people have when purchasing a boat of creating a new kind of life.

At the same time, communication around any future planned restrictions should be aware there may be deeper-rooted frustrations around regulation in boating, beyond the issue of access to specific locations, which may feed into boaters' responses. It should also be recognised that many boat owners frame their activity in terms of its value for money, and carefully weigh up the costs against the perceived benefits. If restrictions are seen to limit the kinds of experience that are available, this may also be a source of tension and resistance.

## 5: Learning and Personal Development

One intention of this current research was to better understand how boaters learn, both in initial stages and during their continued development. This seems critical to any effort to create meaningful change around issues like anchoring with care, for example, and to ensure that learning is both long-lasting and passed on to others.

During open-ended conversations with participants it became clear that learning to sail, in particular, was tied into much broader ideas around self-formation and personal development. Previous research has explored the wider benefits which learning to sail can offer youth. Fraser (2019), for example, discusses the beliefs held by skippers about young people's personal and social development through Sail Training Trips. Fletcher (2017) similarly explores the experiences of all participants in a sail training voyage, including children, teachers, and sea-staff, and links these trips to a rich cultural history dating back to the 'age of sail' (2017:172). The role of these trips in developing personal resilience was also specifically highlighted by Hayhurst et al (2015).

However, forms of learning and development that take place outside of these controlled pedagogical environments, like young people's more general involvement in boating as a sport or hobby, do not seem to have been much investigated. Similarly, the ways in which adults continue to gain boating-related knowledge and skills throughout their lifetime seem also to have been less studied, though a fuller literature review may generate references which have been missed.

This section therefore hopes to do two things. The first is to identify a bit about *how* boaters learn, focusing on the importance of learning-by-doing and personal experience. The second is to explore the wider things which boaters believe learning to be on the water teaches them, including moral values, personal qualities, and transferable skills.

### 5.1: Ways of learning

There are many places where boaters can get advice or learn new things. This might be their local sailing club, perhaps a wider network for people with a similar make of boat, individuals they meet and chat to near where their boat is kept, friends made or met through previous trips, perhaps their own parents or wider family if they are also involved, and different online groups based on features like geographical location. If people want to more actively learn they might reach out to any one of these networks for advice, tag along with a more experienced boater for a trip, complete recognised training courses, read books or watch YouTube videos, of which there are many. With so many different avenues for development, most people I spoke to seemed to centre these influences back onto their personal experience as the ultimate groundwork for knowledge. In other words, boaters reach out to different places to learn, but their personal experience often remains at the centre, where it is used to confirm or challenge other inputs.

A couple of participants, when asked how they first learned to sail, responded by saying that they do not remember ever actively beginning to learn. Their first experiences boating were as very young children. Both P02 and P10 were first taken sailing when they were a few months old, and learned steering or points of sail before they can remember. Some survey respondents similarly highlighted how they grew up around boats with their families. The ways in which participants reflect on their lifetimes of sailing will be considered more in a later section. For now, what is most relevant is that the engagement with boating since childhood highlights how learning to sail, in particular, can be an immersive experience without formal training.

This immersive nature of learning was highlighted by some survey respondents answering the question: "What boating-related skills or knowledge are you currently learning?". S12, for example, answered "None other than learning in the boat". Similarly, S06 highlighted how they learned something new every time they went boating, while S23 suggested that variations in people's personality, ability and circumstances meant teaching others was always a learning experience too. Moreover, most participants I spoke to shared personal stories of difficult experiences in which they learned something about sailing, the boat itself, or themselves as individuals.

Learning through experience can be a very intentional act, as well as an immersive one. For example, P02, who tried to anchor as much as possible, described how he "fastidiously" collected "tidbits of information" about locations. This included the places where you can refill water or safely leave a dinghy when going ashore to get food, as well as how sheltered a location is in different weather conditions. The latter relied on personal experience for two reasons. Firstly, official guides were unable to comprehensively describe how the experience of an anchorage might vary in all the different possible conditions or for different kinds of boat. They were therefore seen to err on the side of caution and to advise against anchoring even when it was possible. Secondly, the experience of anchoring someplace could be very different from what might be assumed on first sight:

*I can think of some places that look quite exposed but, but are really nice. And I can think of other times where on the face of it a place should be beautiful but, and it is beautifully calm, but you can just get this tiny little swell just rolling in. And if you, if you end on to that you're probably all right. But if you're side on to it then it does not take much to set up quite a distinct rolling motion that's, yeah, not how you want to spend the night.*

(P02b)

Learning by doing was also the advice I regularly saw given online to newcomers who were thinking about purchasing a boat or wanted to improve their skills on the water. However, this advice did seem to broadly differ by the type of boating under consideration. People interested in getting involved in powerboating, for example, often seem to be advised to get their RYA Powerboat Level 2, with that covering all they need to be

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competent. Whereas becoming a competent sailor was generally seen to involve a continued effort to sail more, face more challenges, and adapt to more circumstances. In this context, nothing competes with personal experience, even if an initial course or two may be recommended to help people learn the basics.

The difference in advice seems partly due to the view that sailing is much more vulnerable than powerboating to surrounding conditions, like weather or tides. It is also seen as requiring a complex combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, offering “polymathical development” (S14). The general feeling is perhaps that a sailor must learn to respond to a much wider variety of situations, which a single course simply cannot prepare you for. Many survey respondents (S11, S13, S31, S32, S37) highlighted how they were constantly finding more to learn, even “after a lifetime of sailing” (S13). For one participant, the need to continually learn was also related to the way in which technology was constantly evolving:

*Boats are changing so much in the way like the foiling stuff they, like they've got now, where they're literally like flying in the air. Like, people who think they knew everything like 10 years ago, probably don't know everything now. (P10)*

The only obvious outlier to this approach was S23, who claimed they have been sailing out from Poole and anchoring in Studland since the 1980s, and that they do not need any further skills or knowledge. As before, this answer is probably related to existing tensions over anchoring in Studland Bay, rather than a general commentary on the nature of learning while sailing.

Although the need for experience is often highlighted with learning to sail, some survey respondents were also actively pursuing courses like RYA Yachtmaster, RYA Coastal Skipper, or the MCA Master Certificate. Respondents explained how this required them to build mileage through practical experience, as well as book or online learning. This blended approach to learning through multiple mediums is very common. For example, one respondent explained how they were learning astronavigation through “a mix of books, YouTube and conversations” (S10). P08, a novice boater who was learning to sail, similarly referred to a mixture of hands-on experience, YouTube videos, and books she bought very cheaply from a fellow member of an online sailing group, “just because they were excited that we were getting involved in sailing”. Despite this blended nature of learning, personal experience still seemed for some to be the most critical element:

*It seems like the kind of thing you have to do it to learn it. I think you can read a lot of books, and that's so helpful, like you get a sort of base knowledge, but you can't really discover it until you do it, I don't think. (P08)*

*I did my RYA courses years ago but more importantly I have experience and am part of a helping community. (S24)*

Another way in which learning came out during this research was through the requirements of owning and maintaining a boat. One participant, who probably had more detailed knowledge than most through a volunteer position at a boat-breaking yard that sold spare parts, emphasised the complexity involved:

*I don't know if you've considered but you know, a 30-foot yacht, the different elements of understanding and knowledge. Even away from the sailing, you've got electronic systems, you've got a diesel engine, you've got rigging, you've got ropes, you've got fibre glassing, you've got sea safety, you've got all of those different things without even sailing anywhere. (P04)*

While P04 recognised that not every person would share his motivation to understand how every part of the boat worked, the journey of boat ownership could potentially touch upon an incredible amount of varied technical knowledge. This view was shared by one respondent taking on a recovery project of a damaged or old boat (S19), and by another whose limited budget requires them to learn how to maintain and repair different elements themselves (S28). The different specialist knowledges that are joined into a single boat mirrors a description by one survey respondent of how complex boating can be, when asked what boating is similar to:

*Science, philosophy, maths, problem solving, management, organisation, dexterity. Any broad multi-faceted challenging activity would equate. (S14)*

As with sailing, advice given online over boat maintenance or restoration tends to highlight personal experiences more than any hard-or-fast rules. Commentators often respond to questions in detail based on what has worked or not for them in the past, as explained by P08:

*It's not like a, just a comment, like, 'Oh, no, that's not good', it's like a 'here's my life story.'*

In total, both boat ownership and learning to sail often seem to involve individuals drawing on a range of online/offline networks, potentially developing a wide range of technical knowledge, and ultimately making sense of this diversity by focusing it back onto their own personal experience.

## 5.2: Personal Development

One thing that became clear throughout this research is that learning was seen to offer much more than simply how to operate a boat. Boating was important to participants' self-conception, and they identified it as developing everything from moral values, to personal qualities of perseverance and self-reliance, to opportunities for social mobility. While some participants had experience in powerboating as well, this kind of deeper self-formation seemed more generally related to learning to sail.

Only one participant (P04) spoke explicitly about how boating played a role in developing their own personal morals. Some of this he accredited to Sea Scouts, where he first learned to sail, and their focus on willingness to help other people. However, the lessons learned there continued to apply, partly because the potential cost or risks of boating make relying on community a necessity:

*I think boating plays a massive part in why I am like I am. You've got to help other people, because otherwise it's going to cost you a fortune. To get a tow in, a commercial tow on a boat, you're looking at sort of 500 quid. Which is a lot of money. Or, get it for free and wake up 25 people from the RNLI or a lifeboat, they're going to have to run out and do it. So if I can spend two hours of my time solving the problem to save them doing their time, then why not? (P04)*

Although these lessons were learned in a boating context, P04 believed them to underpin his approach to life much more generally. On the day of our call, for instance, he explained that he was going to the dump and so he had asked his neighbours if there was anything they also needed taking – as with the quote above, boating had taught him that if you can easily help somebody else out and save them hassle then that is a thing worth doing.

P04 was also the only participant to explicitly reference motorboating in the context of personal development. This occurred in a story about his seven-year-old son, and how he had recently bought him a small motorboat. While the son only ever took the boat a few metres away, P04 saw it as developing a sense of responsibility and self-control, including the need to respond to accidents or errors. The urge to develop this quality in his son through boating was explicitly linked to P04's own experiences sailing as a teenager, including a memory of being made solely responsible during a voyage from Land's End to Ireland:

*It was an experience that I've, it sticks in my mind, massively. For sure. Because I was given that responsibility. I remember sitting, sitting in the dark looking at the compass. Spray coming over the bow of the boat, it was a horrible storm. And the other two guys were asleep. I was solely responsible for this full 33-foot yacht in the middle of the ocean, going through the gasfields, in the Irish Sea. (P04)*

The same element of responsibility, learned through the process of taking sole control of a boat, was highlighted by P10, a university student who has been teaching dinghy sailing to children for multiple years. As boaters become older, this kind of personal responsibility may become less novel, though it can crop up in other ways. For example, P07 explained how he worried about being responsible for the lives of others on his boat. However, even outside of 'responsibility', being in control of a boat continued to provide opportunities for adult self-development.

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One commonly mentioned benefit (S13, S16, S20, S24) was how boating teaches self-sufficiency/self-reliance. In most cases participants described these situations in individual terms, but S06 also highlighted how boating involves being “reliant on your group skills till you get back”. In the stories shared by participants, this self-reliance was developed out of the idea that boating does not give you another option—in the moment that something goes wrong you must find a solution:

*You suddenly realize, 'I've got to deal with this'. Yeah? Somehow or other, I've got to do something. And it's like, you know, like, lights would go out on, and stop working on the top of the mast. So how are you going to get that fixed? Well you're going to have to climb the mast. (P07)*

While the individual moments may be challenging, multiple participants saw it as developing a mindset which was useful beyond sailing itself. For example, P09 described difficult experiences as generating a rigour and perseverance that, “if you brought those into everyday life, there's not a lot you couldn't do.” Interestingly, two of the younger participants who were both around 20 years old, P08 and P09, seemed to recognise and desire the fact that boats could place them in extreme situations which would then force them to develop in certain ways. For P08 this was connected to living aboard her new boat, and how that would force her (potentially against her will in the cold of winter) into a more outdoors lifestyle. For P09 the intensely challenging and difficult mental experience of a long solo crossing was desired for the kind of mindset and perspective it might create. Although these are fairly extreme examples, many survey responses mentioned the “challenge” which boating presents. It seems fair to say that some individuals value how boating can push them into situations which they then have to find a way to cope with, and in doing so further develop their capabilities and their confidence.

It is precisely because of this increased confidence and self-reliance that some participants highlighted the role which sailing, in particular, can play in social mobility. Both P09 and P10 expressed how it would be valuable to introduce wider groups to sailing because of the personal qualities you gain through learning, as well as practical skills like problem-solving, spatial awareness and teamwork. While P09 was speaking more generally, P10 was aware of specific initiatives related to sailing, diversity and social mobility that were already under way. Implicit in both discussions was the idea that sailing has a history of being exclusive, although P10 was possibly less critical of this as she also valued how sailing was a generational activity within families.

P04 was the only participant to reflect upon social mobility in his own life, and he explained how sailing exposed him to many more experiences than would otherwise have been possible growing up on a council estate near the New Forest. Central to this was the idea that sailing introduces you to people outside your usual circle, gives you the confidence to build relationships with others, and widens your possible horizons

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for the future. The possible benefits were seen to extend way beyond sailing itself into the minutiae of daily life:

*And it's silly, some of the things that I think about is like one of the families that I became very good friends with the mum was French. So I got the experience of eating—and you know I don't know your background, but living in a three bedroom council house it's very beige food, it's very processed food—I got the experience of eating fresh salads with lemon juice, with oil, and cheeses. (P04)*

P04 recognised that he was now in a more fortunate position than most, with a good job, a nice house, and a boat kept nearby on the water. Because of this, he was passionate about giving the same opportunities to others like friends of his son, who had similarly never experienced boating before. He also valued how his son could meet a wide range of people through involvement in boating. This included looking after the boat of a busy Doctor who lives at a distance in London, and thereby gaining the confidence to approach and talk to her as a friend. Together, these kinds of interactions, as well as the self-reliance and responsibility learned while in control of a boat, came together in P04's hope for his son to “be bold, and go out into the world and find life”.

Lastly, while most participants thought that boating could develop beneficial ways of thinking and acting in the world, some also suggested that they already had a prior way of thinking which attracted them to it. P07, for instance, explained how he loved to learn by experience even as a young child, and how his father despaired at toys being deconstructed to see how they worked. P08 similarly rooted her attraction to boating in a wider resourcefulness she had from growing up on a farm, learning about the uses of different trees, how to read weather, and “how to fix anything with a bale of twine”. Whether boating is seen to generate new ways of thinking, or whether it builds upon pre-existing sorts of attitude and approach, does not seem unanimously agreed upon by participants. The relationship between these two frameworks could be interesting to explore further.

### 5.3: Discussion

The above ways of understanding learning have potential consequences for promoting behavioural change among boaters, such as around anchoring with care. The first is that efforts to generate change may benefit from a coordinated and multi-pronged approach that recognises the multiple avenues in which people gain new information, including online groups and sources, printed material, recognised courses, and informal networks of family and friends. It may also be the case that there is a delay in new information being accepted, as change may ultimately depend on boaters putting ideas into practice in their own personal experience before becoming advocates. More generally, it may be valuable to frame new information in

relation to the wider values which learning might be associated with, such as self-reliance, personal challenge, and responsibility.

One clear area for further research is in the potentially different ways people within the boating community learn. A major limitation of this project was how the people spoken to were: 1) generally sailing boat-owners, and 2) probably more involved than many others due to the self-selecting nature of participant recruitment. More research is needed on how those with a more casual relationship to boating come to learn, including the networks of information and advice which they are tied into, and whether they similarly approach learning as a continual process. For example, one participant (P05) highlighted how his wife, who was new to sailing, primarily learned from him on the boat, though she has since gone on to take an RYA Skipper course. It seems important to identify how potentially less-actively involved people who are nonetheless on the boat, like friends and family members of boat-owners, come to learn, and how they might also be reached by any future communication strategies.

In responding to the above, any future interviews with regular boaters could benefit from asking who they go on the water with, including less-involved family or friends, and trying to incorporate those individuals into the participant pool as well. Another potentially valuable research method could be asking participants to keep a diary or learning journal, with a focus on when and where they come across new information, and also if and when they put this new information into practice. This could help to identify the mechanisms more specifically by which new information is gained, acted upon, or resisted. While people new to boating or boat-ownership might be the obvious target for such a study, this method could also be applied to the continual learning of established boaters. It is worth noting that diaries of this kind sort of already exist, through the blogs and vlogs of individuals who document their personal boating journey online. Analysing these could perhaps reveal how boaters make sense of their own learning and personal development, without the external prompts of researchers.

## 6: Lifecourse

This section looks at how participation in boating changes across the lifetime of individuals. It considers the ways in which participants and respondents first became involved in boating, as well as the factors which caused their interest to increase or decrease at specific times and over their life more generally. Connected to this is how some boaters think back on their trajectory and make sense of experiences through their own life history, potentially casting back to childhood, perhaps to the experience of their own parents and grandparents, and forwards to the kinds of involvement they hope to have in the future. Approaching boaters' involvement in this way can highlight personal factors which are seen to facilitate boating as an activity. It can also complicate the assumption that boating is a process of increasing investment and involvement over time.

With regards to the latter point, it can seem natural to assume that involvement in boating moves forwards in a unidirectional way. After all, many boaters do seem to increase their involvement as their financial situation and available leisure time changes with age, and particularly with retirement. This assumption might also be given by the nature of ever-increasing learning and experience, as explored in the previous section, and more general expectations of ever-increasing specialisation and commitment over time in leisure activities (see Scott and Schafer 2001:334). However, as identified by Kuentzel and Heberlein (2008) in their study of involvement over time among Wisconsin Apostle Island boaters, the assumption of continual increase does not hold:

*“One can easily imagine the neophyte sailor going on a trip, discovering his/her interest, sailing more and more, finally buying a boat, and perhaps entering a few boat races. It is harder to think of the person who started sailing and then got married, met new people, but kept boating every once in a while, finally quitting when he/she retired and moved to Arizona. It is even harder to think of a person who is passionate about sailing at one point in time becoming disinterested later in life because priorities and interests have changed and evolved. But it is these latter manifestations of change that are more common than the specialization scenario.” (2008:155)*

The authors go on to identify the need for long-term involvement with participants over many years to accurately assess changes in involvement (Kuentzel and Heberlein 2008:156). While that has not been possible in this present study, the following section nonetheless hopes to identify some relevant factors to participation as they were identified by boaters themselves.

### 6.1: Family

When asked the 2-part survey question, “What motivated you to first become involved in boating? How has your level of involvement changed over time?”, 16 of 37 responses mentioned beginning as a child. The

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other 21 answers do not necessarily preclude starting this young, as the open-text question was framed around motivations and so also allowed for answers like “Contact with nature” (S18) or “Sense of freedom” (S16). However, within the 16 which explicitly mentioned beginning in childhood, 10 responses referred to the influence of family, while the other 6 focused on the respondent as an individual themselves. The latter mostly detail the kinds of boating they started with, like dinghy sailing, and how they later progressed to other kinds of boat. One exception emphasised the agency of themselves as a young child in developing this interest:

*I was 5 and on holiday in Ilfracombe I looked at the yachts in the harbour. Hoped [sic] in a refer [sic] and tried to skull out for a closer look. I got into a bit of trouble over that but my fascination with sailing was established. (S31)*

Returning to family influence, however, responses can be broadly divided into two camps. The first, and more common, was the reference to particular family members, specifically parents or grandparents. The second highlighted a general family background, to the extent of being born into boating as something a family has done “for generations” (S17).

Two interview participants similarly explained that they came from families with a long-standing boating history. For P10 this was her father coming from a “big sailing family”, with her father’s parents having sailed extensively around the Mediterranean and completed Atlantic crossings. By contrast, P07’s family history was more about working on boats, with his father, uncle and grandfather operating as Bristol Channel pilots. P07 was deeply interested in this family history, to the point of sailing the same kind of Bristol Channel pilot cutter on a voyage from Falmouth to Scotland and planning a major trip to recreate his great-grandfather’s 1891 voyage to Argentina. His family’s involvement was framed as being with the sea itself, right back to 1704: “first recorded farmer running away to sea, from North Devon and ended up in Newport”. It was also with the specific place of the Bristol Channel, where like his forebears he learned to sail.

Interestingly, P10 expressed a belief that most people who sail come from this longer-standing family background:

*Sailing is like generally a very generational thing. Like I don't think I've met anyone who has just, like their family is the first generation to go sailing. Generally the trend is that your grandparents or your... Normally it's, it's normally like your grandparents. I wouldn't say I know anyone that's like 'Oh my dad sails so I sail', it's normally like 'Oh my Dad's parents and then their parents', like, it's quite generational. (P10)*

However, P10’s observation was not totally borne out across the other interviews. For instance, P02 explained how his mother and father met through living together on boats, but how they had started sailing

at school and in adult life respectively. Moreover, where participants did become involved in boating because of their grandparents, it did not necessarily imply that they were part of a wider boating family. In the case of P04, his parents had no interest in sailing and did not own a boat, but his grandfather did and was the one who first took him to the local Sailing Club. A similar answer was given by a survey respondent: "Grandad first took me out got me hooked on the sea" (S19).

The role of family in initial involvement was mentioned by a higher proportion of participants in the interview than with survey respondents. Only 2 participants, P08 and P09, made no reference to any prior or relevant family involvement in boating. Even then, P08 highlighted how her parents were still an inspiration in her decision to buy a boat to liveaboard, through comparable efforts they made to be self-reliant on their own farm. It is hard to know whether this higher frequency is due to underlying differences between the participant and respondent groups, or whether it is a consequence of the phrasing of questions and greater space given to answers in interview settings. The latter seems supported by how there are often multiple factors occurring at the same time which conversations can discuss, only one of which might be related to family. Continuing with the case of P04, for example, his grandfather first took him to the Sailing Club, but it was because of that he then joined Sea Scouts, which seems to have been the experience that rapidly grew his interest and involvement.

Family dynamics can also be a reason for changing involvement in adulthood. Marriage was a key factor in the discussion with P05, who initially stopped boating for around 20 years because his first wife was not interested. He only started again when they parted and has since become much more involved as his new wife supports the idea of a round-the-world trip, after hearing how important sailing was to him in the past. Where his first wife's reluctance was seen to stymie his involvement, his second wife's enthusiasm has led to a more serious commitment to sailing than ever before, including buying an ocean-going yacht and planning to rent out their home.

Others found their involvement changing through having children or a family of their own. One survey respondent listed their motivation for beginning boating as "looking for something different that both me and the family can enjoy" (S08). Another described how their personal trajectory of increasing involvement was halted by their family being uninterested:

*Family background then scouts then sailing clubs... And finally co-owner of small yacht.*

*Now have family of more reluctant boaters so not done much in recent years. (S01)*

Even within a single life story, the effects of family influence on involvement can be complicated. P07 purchased a small dinghy from his own mother as a "family project" alongside his wife and children, but his wife soon lost interest. Having already bought the boat it became something he increasingly sailed on his own, eventually leading him to club sailing and racing, even though that had not been the initial motivation.

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But family influences increased P07's involvement in a different way to expected, as he undertook courses to be an instructor after being bored with merely observing while his children did water sports:

*Why? Partly out of boredom? Because, you know, with my kids going off doing sailboarding or whatever, I was sort of kicking my heels watching them doing that. I couldn't go on the water myself, because they were doing these activities. So you sort of get involved in, in learning, then to become more involved, if that makes sense. (P07)*

This desire to be involved while family members are busy with activities was also highlighted by P06. As the Class Captain of coastal rowing at a sailing club, she saw many partners of sail club members start coastal rowing as a way to be involved and on the water, particularly if sailing did not appeal.

Two other participants were at the stage of thinking ahead to what they wanted for their children and family in the future. For P04, a father to a young son, this affected his involvement in contradictory ways. On the one hand, he justified the ongoing cost of owning a boat as a "great investment" in the future of his son, his wife, and himself, believing it to offer unique and valuable opportunities. On the other hand, he was personally postponing a round-the-UK sail trip for a few years, until his son was old enough to walk himself home from school. By contrast, P08 was opting to buy a boat and liveaboard partly because she has always had the goal of "boats and babies". While this was presented in a humorous way, particularly in how awkward a topic that was to raise with her partner the first time they met, she was serious about wanting to create a lifestyle which would allow her future children to grow up in a nature-focused and active outdoors setting.

The role of family dynamics, therefore, seems highly individual. Many people refer to family influences as beginning their own journey, either through specific family members or through generational family involvement. Changes in family structure, like getting married or having children, were also common factors in changing people's level of involvement, though in which direction cannot be universally stated. For some it pushed them into greater levels of involvement, while for others the reluctance of family members led to them decreasing their own activity. While the direction of change may be personally dependent, the overall sense is that family influences are seen as a major factor in boating involvement.

## 6.2: Place

The importance of place was another factor which was highlighted in surveys and interviews. 'Place' is chosen over location or residence because it implies a geographical space which is overlaid with personal or social meaning (see Saar and Palang 2009). Some participants and respondents mentioned particular places as a driving force in their introduction to boating. One example, which has already been mentioned, was P07 and his relationship to the Bristol Channel, where he learned to sail and where prior generations of his family

plied their trade as pilots. P07 had continued to sail these waters throughout his life while also heading further afield for longer voyages.

I had expected more individuals to mention how living in particular places affected their initial involvement in boating, perhaps through growing up in a “sailing town” like Cowes, described as such by P10. However, this did not appear in survey responses, with the exception of 2 respondents who listed anchoring at Studland Bay as their motivation. As explored above, initial involvement was much more linked to family influences. Place seemed more relevant when there was a change to where people lived, affecting the type or extent of their boating involvement. The causal link between movement and involvement was mentioned by one respondent describing their personal motivation:

*Friends and family...Then moving to the coast meant that access was greatly increased, so my level of boating increased with it. (S33)*

A more detailed description of movement and changing involvement was given by P06, who initially learned to sail while growing up in Malta. Moving to London for university and work led her to stop, before she eventually moved to the coast and started becoming involved with boating once again. Despite this latest move, P06 referenced her initial influences as still affecting the kinds of boating that she enjoyed. Growing up in the Mediterranean involved cruising on larger sailing boats, and she pointed to this as a reason why dinghy sailing was something she was less interested in, despite it being very popular in Chichester harbour near where she now lives. She also explained how sailing in the Mediterranean had not required her to “look at the weather forecast, or act serious, or think about wet weather gear”, something which sailing in the UK was implied to involve. This may have been an influencing factor in her uptake of coastal rowing, which she explained was less limited than coastal sailing by the weather or the time of year, although the social aspect of rowing was also a key motivation.

One thing which P06's story highlights is the relationship between types of boating activity and the limitations of particular places. This was explicitly discussed by P05 who, with his wife, owned and sailed a large deep-keeled yacht. The shallow waters of the north Norfolk coast where they lived significantly limited their sailing opportunities. It required them to keep their boat at a marina in the deep-water port of Lowestoft, where they found little in the way of community and where options for nearby destinations were highly limited:

*We spent two and a half years at Lowestoft, like I say in two different marinas, sort of shrugging our shoulders going, 'Where is everybody? And why does nobody around here want to talk boats or actually do anything?' And in the end, you know, that, combined with the fact that from Lowestoft, it's alright, it's a deep-water port, but actually there*

*isn't any where to go from there that isn't quite a long way away. So the idea of nipping out and anchoring for the night or something is just not possible. (P05)*

On New Year's Day, 2021, they decided to move their boat to a marina by the River Orwell, significantly further away near Ipswich. They were hoping for a greater sense of community at the marina itself, a wider range of options as places to sail, and the opportunity for estuary sailing, which is less affected by weather and means they can sail in a wider range of conditions. They therefore hoped that the move would allow them to become more involved in the kinds of boating which they enjoyed, despite their boat being kept at a greater distance. In this case, it seems clear that multiple factors interacted in ideas about place and its facilitation of boating involvement, including geography, weather, type of boat, type of activity (i.e. weekend trips at anchor), and community presence.

Other participants similarly moved to new places in the hopes of being part of a greater boating community, which could then facilitate their own future involvement. P09, for example, chose to attend university in Southampton partly so that he could meet people similarly interested in boating and go sailing with them on the weekends and other trips. But decisions to move were not only made because participants hoped for greater involvement in the future. One participant (P10) explained how her family moved to the Isle of Wight, where their boat was already kept, because of the increasing importance that sailing was already having in their lives. In this case, the decision to move was seen as a natural conclusion to the increasing involvement that was already taking place, rather than being a cause of increasing involvement itself.

### 6.3: Instructing and boating-related careers

For some participants and respondents, involvement with boating was central to their career. S20 initially became involved through the Royal Navy, while S21 was initially on a different career path before the experience of being lifeboat crew motivated them to become a freelance RYA instructor. Two of the three university students I interviewed, P09 and P10, were also pursuing boating-related careers in Yacht and Powercraft Design after having extensive experience boating in their youth, which P09 explicitly referred to as having "shaped what I want to do".

While the above are full-time careers that both influence and are influenced by boating involvement, a wider range of participants were involved in boating as work. In particular, three participants mentioned having been an instructor (P05, P07, P10), while a fourth (P06) was hoping to undertake instructor courses in the future. Becoming an instructor was generally mentioned as part of a narrative about how their involvement in boating developed over time, rather than in the context of a career. For example, P07, as already mentioned, began instructing to fill the time while his children were busy with water-sports at the local yacht club, and because of his own increasing interest in dinghy sailing. Similarly, P10 described how being paid to teach came as a step in her own progressive involvement:

*And then, because I was more interested in it, I did more dinghy stuff like racing on the weekend. And I got my own, I bought my own dinghy, a Laser, when I was about 15, I think it was. Quite saved up for it. And then I'd like race at the weekends...But yeah, I did end up dinghy sailing, and then got to the point where I was like, 'Oh I'll earn, I can make some money out of it'. So I did my instructors course, when I was about 17, I think it was, um, and, yeah. Then I took a gap year and I went and instructed over in Australia for eight months.*

Learning to be an instructor was a way in which participants were able to capitalise on their existing skills and experience, and a means by which their involvement in boating could more generally increase. For those who took this path, it was presented as a natural progression of involvement and development, though evidently many boaters never go on to teach others. The idea of instructing as a step in increasing personal involvement, not just as a career decision, might be supported by the way in which it was seen to offer new experiences. This was highlighted across S21's survey responses, where instructing offered continual learning opportunities, but also by P10's description of her time instructing in Australia, where she was able to undertake unique experiences like sailing a boat used in the Invictus games from Sydney to the Yacht Club where she was employed.

However, the transition of boating into a full-time career was also shown in some interviews to be actively resisted. Although P10 worked as a sailing instructor during a gap year before university, she also warned against doing something "too seriously, to the point where you just don't enjoy it anymore". In particular, she had seen many people kill their enjoyment of sailing by racing competitively as a career, and she increasingly chose to approach boating as something done just for fun. In a similar vein, P07 followed his family into a career on the water by becoming an engineer with the merchant navy, but eventually found he hated it and stopped sailing for many years once he returned to shore. It was only through having children that he began to build up his involvement in boating again.

The tension here is perhaps similar to many other situations in which a hobby, sport or passion has the potential to become a job. Many individuals do develop skills and experience which could form the basis of boating as a career, but may lack the interest or opportunity to pursue this route. Further research could explore how boaters perceive the opportunities which are available to monetise their skills and experience. This may reveal more about how individuals perceive their personal trajectory of involvement and development, as well as the kinds or reasons they give for doing what they do.

#### 6.4: Boat buying, progression and age

Within the histories of involvement given by many respondents and participants, a key moment was first buying a boat. Boat ownership is definitely not a pre-requisite for being involved in boating, with one participant (P05) describing how they are an “interesting concept” at their local sail club for actually having a boat of their own, unlike most other members. Perhaps because of this, many responses throughout this project presented boat ownership as a catalyst for increasing involvement, even as a “turning point” (S06) in their experience.

Boat-ownership can affect involvement by allowing trips to be taken on owners' own schedules, increasing spontaneity in both deciding to go someplace and deciding how long to stay, and generally providing the freedom that comes from having already paid the bulk of the cost, so that boating now becomes better value the more journeys you take. The effect of boat ownership can also be as much about the maintenance and investment of time involved. P03 explained how he first became “hooked” on boating after spending the time to maintain a narrowboat which his dad bought, as well as through the weekend trips away which that maintenance enabled. This recalls the description of maintaining a boat on a tight budget from the previous section, where the time and learning involved may require high levels of commitment while offering new kinds of reward and personal development.

While first owning a boat may be a turning point, many respondents explained their history of involvement as a progression of boats increasing in size. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, the idea of buying a bigger boat is still relevant to many, with four survey respondents listing it as their future plan (S02;S24; S33; S36). Progressing to a bigger boat can seem like a fairly set path, with individuals moving from dinghy sailing into yachts, which may then increase in size to allow for greater comfort and potentially longer voyages (S12; S13; S18; S37). This pathway was also shared by some interview participants like P03 and P07, the latter of whom explained how a larger boat encouraged his wife to join him sailing and led to extensive trips together around the south coast of Wales.

Buying a new boat can also be linked to a desire for different kinds of experience or challenge. This can include everything from staying out overnight at anchor for longer trips, completing crossings to other countries, or taking on personal challenges like circumnavigating the UK. For example, P08 knew she eventually wanted to buy an ocean-going yacht, once she was a strong enough sailor to complete a voyage across and down to West Africa. For now, however, she had opted for a sturdy bilge-keel Westerley, which was both forgiving to learn in and allowed her to park the boat on a beach rather than anchor or enter a marina. As I saw often online, many boat buyers are also working to the limit of what is financially possible. In this case, a larger yacht might be the ideal, but it is worked up to over time through owning and selling smaller boats, like moving up the property ladder. Or, if the ideal boat is not known, buying and selling can

be part of a long-term learning process about the kind of boat that best suits a person and the activities they undertake.

Not all participants depicted boat ownership as a matter of continuing to scale up in size. There may be no need or reason to change. This was the point made by P10 when describing her Laser dinghy as a potential “boat for life”. She highlighted how the same model she bought as a teenager is still being raced by people at the sailing club who are 50 years old. By contrast, a potential owner may jump straight into the deep end, as with the case of P05 who bought a large ocean-going yacht, after a long break from sailing, to sail around the world with his wife. Or, in a third option, various factors may lead to buying a smaller boat instead. This was the case for one respondent, who explained that his plans for the future have changed in the following way:

*Downsizing to smaller boat (about 32ft) as now getting too old for single handing and berthing a 10 tonner. Covid has made me more aware of my limitations. (S14)*

It may be possible that S14's decision to move to a smaller boat is unusual. Sailing a 10-tonne boat single-handedly seems to be on the more extreme end of most boaters spoken to during this project, and is perhaps more affected by age and reduced mobility than the kind of boating which most people would undertake. However, age was more widely claimed to play a role in changing boating behaviours by a number of participants. P06 described how people often join coastal rowing because they feel unable to physically sail anymore, but still want to be involved in the sail club and spend time on the water. They may, for example, find it difficult to duck under the boom or move around the boat. In these cases, P06 argues that coastal rowing becomes “a way to continue”, as most people can row so long as they are able to get into the boat. Changing physical abilities were also referenced by P03, an older male boater, in how some sailors shift to motorboating in their old age. He personally found that his muscles no longer reacted as quickly as he would like, which limits his ability to race a dinghy, as well as being “a bit old” now for kayaking.

In total, purchasing a boat, and possibly going on to buy a bigger boat in turn, seem to be significant markers for how people chart their involvement over time. Yet this research has also suggested that there are alternative pathways to this trajectory. A more detailed study would be needed to identify how people progress into, through, and out of boat ownership, as well as what this journey means to them. Wider factors like finances, availability of people to go out with regularly on the water (like friends or family), age, disability, etc., could all be more directly explored. Any such study should also, by definition, try to expand beyond those who currently see boating as something important or growing in their lives to include those who are also decreasing their involvement.

## 6.5: Reflection

The above discussed factors—family, place, work, and boat-ownership—are aspects which have been drawn out of responses, and which seem relevant to how people understand changing involvement over time. However, some participants and respondents also actively reflected upon their own life-course, and through it framed their activity as meaningful. An example of this came in response to a survey question asking respondents to provide an image that was meaningful to them about boating. One response was a stunning photograph of climbers halfway up a cliff-face, looking on to the blue sea beyond where a wooden sailboat was at anchor. In the follow-up questions about the image, the respondent explained why it was meaningful:

*I was on a climbing expedition circa y2k but eyed a dream. Fast forward 20 years and I have sailed those waters, spotting climbers on the cliffs (S32)*

This image seems to represent the respondent's own journey from being on the rocks admiring to being on the boat looking back. It encapsulates, and connects, 20 years of life, and shows that the respondent's own life trajectory may be an active subject of reflection. The idea of changing position, of achieving something you once viewed from outside and looking back to where you previously stood, was poetically described by P07:

*Sailing into Solva in West Wales for the first time, for me was, was an amazing pleasure. And I remember being probably about 14 or 15. And sitting down on the, the side of the estuary in Solva as a kid and thinking, 'Oh, God, oh my God, I'd love to sail into here one day'. And then actually being able to do it. And it, it was every bit as good as I thought it would be...I could see myself as a young guy, standing there, you know, dreaming about doing what I was doing, sort of thing. (P07)*

In both P07's story and S32's photograph, self-reflection seems closely related to a particular place, somewhere sailing has brought them back to and which provides a connection to the ambitions of their younger self. This seems similar to the responses given by some survey respondents on the childhood origins of their boating ambition (S31), but also to one respondent's explanation that they always had the inclination to sail but never followed through with it when younger, only beginning to sail 7 years ago but achieving plenty since then (S03).

Reflecting on their own lives was also a way in which some participants thought about the experiences they wanted to pass on to others. The clearest example of this was given by P04, who hoped to recreate "magical experiences" he had sailing as a teenager with his own son, particularly an interaction with dolphins playing at the bow when out deep at sea. Another respondent submitted an image of their daughter teaching their

granddaughter and grandson to sail, with an explanation of its selection: "Chosen because passing my love of sailing onto future generations is really important to me" (S38).

Finally, some participants reflected deeply upon what they wanted from their future life, and the role in which boating might play in this. For P09, studying remotely in his first year of university, this took the form of wanting to achieve something difficult, something "you can tell people that you've done and be proud of it". Examples included a solo Atlantic crossing or circumnavigation of the globe, but he had more generally been thinking a lot recently about doing something that made life "worthwhile". This desire to make life meaningful was also mentioned by P05, the only participant to mention death, in a discussion about bringing forward their plan to start sailing around the world:

*And, you know, I think, I think the whole COVID scenario has sort of reinforced this even more. There's an awful lot of people who are now not even making it to retirement, let alone enjoying their retirement. You know, and again, if you've got the opportunity to not work and go and do the things that you want to do, why would you not take that opportunity? (P05)*

## 6.6: Discussion

While specific avenues for future research have been mentioned throughout, there are two main ways in which research into the lifecourse of boaters could be extended. The first is to observe changes in involvement over time, and to link this to contextual factors and possible causes. This could be a similar panel study to that of Kuentzel and Heberlein (2008) mentioned at the start of this section, where researchers engage with a group of boaters over multiple years through repeat surveys or interviews. A benefit of this method is that it might better capture possible decreases in involvement over time, and the possible reasons for decline.

A less thorough approach, but one that would cost less in time and resources, would be to conduct a survey on boating activity that asks how participants' level of involvement has changed over the last 1, 5, 10 years, for example, and the reasons for that change. It could be made clear that increases, decreases, and plateaus of activity are all of interest, and this could provide specific lines of questioning, e.g. 'Has your involvement in boating ever significantly decreased? What were the reasons for this change?'

However, the survey option is similar to this present research in relying on boater's own descriptions of their lifecourse, which is not the same as observing change over time. It may instead be valuable to lean into this subjectivity even more, and to utilise creative methods to explore how boaters think about the changes in their lives. An example may be to create timelines, perhaps as an in-person activity of large paper sheets and markers, or as a collage of participants' own photographs. The factors identified in this project as meaningful, e.g. family, place, work, age, boat-ownership, could be used as prompts for participants to add

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contextual information, while encouraging them to include other factors they think are relevant. Discussions of each other's timelines might also reveal wider points of similarity or difference.

Why might further research into boaters' lifecourses be valuable? There are a few possible answers. The first is that it could highlight unexpected places to extend efforts over changing behaviour. For example, partners of sailors may be involved in other kinds of activities at sail clubs, where any learning could still trickle across into future joint sailing trips. The second is that it might highlight meaningful categories by which boaters think about the past and the future, such as the chance to achieve ambitions first identified when younger, or to recreate experiences with the next generation. This could be tied into a communication strategy around protecting the habitats of areas at risk, for example. The third is that it may reveal more about those who either have no interest in further increasing their involvement, or are even actively decreasing it, but who nonetheless are still boating in some way. These individuals may not have the same resources or inclination to change their boating habits in line with ReMEDIES project goals, and so understanding more about their potential situations could suggest other modes of outreach and communication.

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## 7: Types of Boat/Boater

A key part of this project was understanding how boaters think about their community, and how it might be sub-divided into different types of boater. This initially became a topic of interest in response to work carried out by Twigger-Ross et al. (2021), where they aimed to identify different types of recreational boater. This present research hoped to build upon that approach by identifying the various categories which boaters themselves found to be meaningful. This could potentially help to make future outreach more targeted and relevant, while mitigating against possible resistance from individuals who may feel like they are being lumped together.

One survey respondent, when asked what activity boating is most similar to, gave an overview of its sheer diversity:

*Boating is a sport that encompasses people from different backgrounds to participate. Young and old, male and female, rich or poor, as individuals or small groups or families. Boating covers everything from rowing boats, sailing dinghies, fishing boats, paddle boards, windsurfing, kite sailing, personal water craft at the lower level through speedboats, canal barges, to family motor boats and sailing boats, right up to mega yachts. There are boats over 100 years old still in use, yet others buy new boats, so you do not need to be rich to go boating. (S26)*

The above stood out for its emphasis on the range of opportunities within boating, which may not lend itself to simple divisions. However, most participants did highlight one or two important distinctions which the wider community, like experience, available income, or type of boat. By analysing the explanations of participants, this section aims to show two things: 1) The boundaries of these categories can be blurred, and 2) Alternate ways of dividing the community are often based on similar underlying distinctions about attitude and values.

### 7.1: Differences between type of boat

One observation from across multiple interviews was how participants rarely had experience of only one kind of boating. For example, P09 and P10 were keen sailors, both around 20 years old, who regularly spent time aboard small powerboats owned by their friends. For P10 this was especially something done in the summer, when accessing small bays around the Solent could feel like being in "Saint-Tropez". The overlap between different types of boating and the time of year was also mentioned by P06. She explained how coastal rowing offered a larger window for boating than sailing, and hence some sailors in her club took up coastal rowing as an additional way to spend time on the water. She herself combined coastal rowing with crewing on sailboats when friends and neighbours were "desperate", as well as occasional sailing

expeditions together with her husband. A specific overlap also came in how participants who had spent time as dinghy instructors also had experience with powerboating, as a license for the latter was a prerequisite.

An interesting angle given by P04 was how other types of boating “supplement” his sailing, including kayaking, paddle boarding, and owning a small powerboat. This allows for different kinds of trips with his wife and son, such as driving to Cornwall with a trailer full of water-sport equipment for two weeks of holiday. The hierarchy of having sailing as the focus, with other types of boating as supplementary, would be interesting to explore in greater detail. There is no evidence from these interviews that sailing is actually the activity on which the most time is spent. Its centrality could, in line with points raised in earlier sections, relate more to sailing’s importance for boaters’ self-concept. P09, for example, trivialised his experiences powerboating as being fun and exhilarating but lacking sailing’s potential for personal development and unique experience. Further research on this could perhaps involve participants completing a time log of their various activities, to see if there is a difference between the activities that individuals identify with and the activities in which they participate.

The limits to seriously pursuing more than one type of boating were specifically highlighted by P02: each aspect of the hobby could become “consuming” in its own right, with a significant cost in time and money. However, P02 also suggested that the distinction between motorboating and sailing can be slightly false, as many people who own sailing boats seem happy to spend a large proportion of the time using their engine, with little actual sailing involved. While a person who extensively uses their engine is unlikely to have the same experience on the water as if they were in a dedicated motorboat, they may perhaps value the same ease of access around the coastline and the greater freedom from the wind’s constraints.

The distinction between motorboaters and sailors can break down further when considering how people change between activities with age. As expressed by one of the participants in the 2021 research by Twigger-Ross et al., some motorboaters are long-term sailors who have “degenerated” into motorboating as they became older, but they still remain “sailing people”. A similar explanation was given by an older male participant in this current research:

*Some motor boaters are sailors who, by virtue of age or infirmity, have moved on to something that just requires pressing a button and steering. (P03)*

In general, it seems that sailors can remain seen as sailors, regardless of a change in their type of boat, because of their existing experience and ways of thinking and acting. A fuller study on this topic could perhaps benefit from the literature on essentialism—the study of how certain categories are “represented as having deep, hidden, and unchanging properties that make their members what they are” (Prentice and Miller 2007:202). For now, however, it is enough to say that being a ‘sailor’ can refer to something different from simply sailing a boat.

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If the distinctions between types of boater are fuzzy, that also brings into question the actual target of people's criticism. In a couple of cases, participants did reference motorboaters as being different in a negative way. This concurs with statements made to Twigger-Ross et al. in their 2021 research, where motorboaters were portrayed as less environmentally conscious. One detailed example from this present research is given below:

*Secondly, there are the motorboaters, the ones in the big what we might call 'Gin Palaces', which are a completely different animal. And it's a bit like a Porsche Cayenne whizzing down the motorway. That sort of mentality, you know, the 'Get out of my way', they don't sort of have any consideration for anybody else. For example, at one stage, I was sailing across to, um, going around Portland Bill, I wasn't there yet. And two great big 40-foot motorboats, probably costing 250,000 plus each, came 20 feet either side of my boat. And, you know, it's the turbulence, the wash made it all, you know, all over the place. And it's just they did it because they could do it, not because they should do it. And that I see as a sort of a mental difference. (P03)*

There is a lot happening at once in the story above, and a couple of issues are overlaying one another. The first is that we are talking about motorboaters, which in the context of our conversation was being opposed to sailors. However, this is more specifically about those motorboaters who have a lot of money to spend on a large and expensive boat. By naming it a 'Gin Palace', a commonly invoked term against large motorboats, P03 touches on associated ideas about people for whom boating requires no serious acquisition of knowledge or skill, and perhaps who spend more time entertaining in a marina than out on the water. At the core of all of this, however, is the attitude that is on display: arrogance, superiority, and a lack of consideration for others. While the story may have begun with a type of boat, even a sub-type of large and expensive motor cruisers, it ends by emphasising the "mental difference" between types of people.

Although it may be seen to overlap, this mental difference is not limited to a motorboat/sailing divide. For example, in discussions online I occasionally saw sailing boat owners dismissing others as WAFIs—'Wind-Assisted F\*\*\*ing Idiots'. While this term is sometimes employed by motorboat owners to refer to sailing in general, it can also be used by sailors themselves. I have seen it aimed at people who bought boats during COVID with no prior sailing experience, at individuals who look down on untidy working boats while never taking their own yacht out of the marina, and more generally at those whose inexperience or lack of care when sailing puts themselves and others at risk. "Plastic Fantastic" was a term used in a similar way by an interviewee in Twigger-Ross et al (2021).

The overlap between stereotypes about 'WAFIs' and motorboaters is in the absence of care and consideration for others and the lack of interest in learning how to be a responsible boater. It may make

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sense to understand this divide in the context of beliefs discussed in previous sections, e.g. how the experience of sailing requires an awareness of surroundings; how learning to sail teaches responsibility. Considering how strongly people believe sailing to have fundamentally shaped them and their way of acting in the world, it makes sense that there may be strong feelings of difference from those not seen to have gone through the same lifetime of experience and personal development.

## 7.2: Differences within sailing

Participants also distinguished between different types of sailor. Sometimes this occurred spontaneously but it was also in response to questions about the way the boating community could be subdivided. One way in which sailors were divided was between those who were seen as making an effort to sail 'properly', meaning they were trying to achieve maximum performance, and those who were not. This distinction was made by P05, who described how a lot of people sail in a "that'll do" manner. Examples included not appropriately trimming their sails or sailing with their fender trailing in the water. While P05 did have a background in racing, he described his desire for maximum performance as being based more on how he saw sailing in a binary way: "It's either right or it's wrong" (P05). He also explained that he knew others did not hold this same opinion, as he was regularly involved in disagreements online when he posted comments in sailing groups to this effect.

There are perhaps two kinds of distinction being made above. The first is between people who aim to achieve maximum performance and those who do not. However, this seems to be based on an underlying difference between those who see sailing as being either right or wrong, like P05, and others who may take a less binary view. An interesting nuance was provided by P02, who explained how there will "always be a certain amount of effort" (P02b) towards trimming the sails for better performance when a comparable boat is nearby. This is partly due to an internal feeling of competition, a racing inclination, but also because there is a personal pride in wanting the boat to look good. Compared to P05's absolute view, P02's statement shows how certain norms about 'proper' sailing might be acted out in contexts where boaters encounter one another, but not in private. How boaters' think about the norms of their community, and the way in which they enact these (or not), could be a topic for a whole other project.

The distinction between those who aim for maximum performance, and those who do not, was also reflected upon by P06 in the context of coastal rowing. For her, this distinction existed but was unproblematic. There were certain crews who aimed to improve their technique, possibly hoping to compete in races, and there were others who enjoyed rowing as a social activity. P06 saw no problem in people taking the latter approach so long as they were safe on the water, explaining that they will just not go as far in the same time, "and that's fine". Her role, as Class Captain for rowing at the sailing club, was to help

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more people get into the boat and then to help them figure out “what type of rower they might want to be” (P06).

Another distinction which some participants gave was between those who enjoyed sailing for the journey and those who sailed for the destination. Particularly among long-distance sailors, such as retirees in the Mediterranean, P05 believed the sailing itself was often seen as a “chore”. By contrast, the destination for him was secondary to the journey:

*Some people who sail use the actual sailing itself purely as a vessel to get where you're going. Whereas with me, it's more a case of I enjoy the sailing. (P05)*

Examples of prioritising the destination could perhaps be found among survey respondents, many of whom emphasised the pleasure of arriving or staying in particular places. It is hard to be definite about this as the limits of the survey mean it is not clear how enjoyment of the destination ranked against enjoyment of sailing itself. Among other participants it was generally the case that sailing was enjoyed for its own sake, though there are some points of possible comparison. For example, P04 explained how sailing was a way of upgrading the experience of destinations. Arriving by boat turned breakfast at the Isle of Wight or an ice cream in Portsmouth Harbour into a holiday. P08, while operating in a different context as a soon-to-be liveaboard boater, actively compared herself to those in Falmouth who “sail to actually sail” rather than for a “cheap and free way of life”.

A further distinction that was made by P02 was between individuals who stay out at anchor and those who do not. He explained how areas may be busy with boaters in the day, but many of those will return to shore rather than remaining at anchor overnight. For P02, this was not just a difference in activity but was seen as probably mapping onto similar interests in nature, isolation, and the escape from busy life on land:

*It's sort of self-selecting... The other people who are anchoring and doing that are the people who will, who are broadly sort of valuing the same things in it that you are. (P02a)*

If the decision to anchor was one way in which P02 made assumptions about fellow boaters, the other was in the actual boat they sailed. An interesting or unusual boat—“Not white and fibreglass!” (P02a)—was seen as a good indicator that the owner was also interesting and possibly worth actively engaging with, for example by rowing alongside and saying hello. People who owned a boat that was wooden or steel, set up with an unusual rig, or even just painted with interesting colours, were assumed by P02 to share something in common with his approach to sailing—an active interest beyond the set-up that is bought and sold “90%” of the time. P02 did recognise that there were exceptions and that some people he had become close friends with were in fact owners of white fibreglass boats. But in general, he assumed that an unusual boat

correlated with whether a person would be like-minded, overlapping for instance with whether they would similarly stay overnight at anchor:

*Certainly I wouldn't not try and engage with someone on that basis; on the other hand I would be, yeah, I would think it might be less interesting, and if it was mid-afternoon I would think that they might well disappear by the evening. (P02a)*

### 7.3: Reasons for difference

A couple of participants pointed to specific reasons behind differences of attitude between boaters. P10, as described previously, believed that most people who sail have a family connection to sailing. However, the level of seriousness with which people pursued it depended on the type of family involvement. Those who grew up sailing, because they were born into families who sailed, tended to be more relaxed and treat it as something done for fun. Whereas those who took it very seriously as racers had families who actively spent a lot of time and money in facilitating their opportunities. A third category were dinghy sailors whose parents had similarly tried dinghy sailing when younger and thought sailing was perhaps a good thing to get into. Family background therefore determined the difference between people who saw sailing as an automatic part of their life, as a potential career, or just as a hobby.

Personal finances were another reason that a couple of participants gave for differences in approach. For P08 this was quite a simple division between her intention to save money through sailing as a liveaboard boater, and most other people's approach to sailing as being something to spend their savings on in older age. However, financial factors divided boaters in other ways for P04:

*I perceive there to be three groups of boaters or yachties or sailors. One the shoestringers, one the people like me, and one the people who have lots of money and just throw. (P04)*

"Shoestringers" were those who tried their hardest to get afloat on a limited budget and learned to do many things themselves. They were generally a supportive community who shared advice and time with one another. By contrast, people with money to throw at boating could be awful on the water, with little consideration for others. P04 supposed this to be because the limitations of their jobs meant they only had the opportunity to sail a few times a year, and so prioritised themselves and their enjoyment over all others when they could actually get out.

Interestingly, P04 saw himself as part of a third group who, while trying to achieve everything on a low budget like "shoestringers", had the prior knowledge about boating to plan some things many years in advance. This meant, for example, that he had a much nicer mooring than most "shoestringers" because he had put himself on a waiting list at multiple sailing clubs a decade prior. However, the main distinction was

between himself and those who spent a lot of money to sail only occasionally, as less pressure on time meant a greater openness to helping others:

*People like me sail every week and spend a lot less. And therefore we don't mind spending our time supporting other people, and helping other people, and investing in ourselves and other people. (P04)*

So while P04 divided boaters on the basis of their approach to spending money, the reason this correlates with a difference in attitude is because people's job requirements affect their available time to go sailing, and hence their willingness to spend time on others.

#### 7.4: Discussion

This section has focused on the differences between types of boater that were given by participants. It found that many distinctions were made on the basis of perceived attitudes. The strongest of these were about being considerate and helpful towards others, but there were a range of other kinds of difference expressed as well, such as whether sailing itself is valued or the degree to which people sail for fun. It is also interesting to note that there were a number of categories which were not mentioned but which might perhaps have been expected. There was, for example, no distinction made between boat owning vs renting, or being local vs non-local.

While 'motorboaters' could often be characterised as less considerate on the water, the overlap between different types of boating suggests that it may be valuable to see this distinction within wider concerns about being considerate and responsible. However, it is important to note that this project did not speak to anybody who identified themselves as solely a motorboater. The suggestions above therefore relate to individuals who generally see themselves as sailors, though often with wider experience in other kinds of boating as well. Further research would be needed to explore whether individuals who identify as motorboaters see the distinctions between types of boater in the same way. Similarly, more detailed research would be required to identify how the above-mentioned differences might intersect with other factors like gender, age, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic status.

Finally, while the focus here has been on difference, people did connect different types of boating through shared values as well. S26, for example, said that within the diversity of boating "we all appreciate the water we use, and try to do the least damage to the environment". P09 similarly explained how fellow sailors at university were all happy to share common interests and comparable experiences, irrespective of the type of approach they took to sailing. More generally, at least 4 participants advised me to just get on the water in some way, regardless of whether that was by paddleboard, sailboat, or any other means. For P07, the differences between these types of boating were simply down to scale, but could share the same aspirations:

*If you're on a stand-up paddleboard, or in a kayak, paddling two miles from Dartmouth up to Dittisham, where my Sailing Club is, it's as much an adventure as it is for me sailing around to Torquay or Salcombe. And you appreciate that, and I think you are a part of that sort of community, you're appreciating the fact there's a sense of adventure. (P07)*

Even when thinking about differences within the boating community, this potential for shared ground (or shared water) is worth keeping in mind.

## 8: Community

As may have become clear in the previous section, asking participants about differences between types of boater also revealed ways in which they viewed the idea of community more widely. This includes how the boating community is constituted, their way of relating to it as individuals, and the factors which make it unique or different from other networks in their wider lives.

Approaching community through this sort of subjective framing has proved valuable in many research settings. A subjective approach can reveal the different grounds on which people feel attached to others, like hobbies or residence, and the scales at which connection might be thought about, from local to global (see Wood and Waite 2011). It can be particularly useful for exploring how people negotiate a personal combination of online and offline networks (see Orgad 2009), like the situation of most boaters in this research. It can also highlight the work done by individuals to create a feeling of inclusion or belonging. This could, for example, include attending a cruising weekend, giving advice to somebody in the same boatyard, or following updates from boating-related groups online.

This section therefore highlights the various ways in which community was framed, before focusing on ideas of spontaneity, shared mindset, and networks of mutual support.

### 8.1: Survey variety

As this project became interested in subjective feeling, one survey question asked: "Where (related to boating) have you found the greatest sense of community?" The answers were highly varied and are roughly grouped below:

- Sailing clubs (S09; S11; S12; S13; S16; S22; S29, S30; S37)
- Online (S32), including in groups (S06) or forums (S24)
- Among crew (S10), including one of all-women (S27)
- With other instructors (S21)
- Named areas within the UK (S04; S08; S18; S20; S34; S38)
- Overseas, with comments made about the absence of community in the UK (S03; S14)
- Among sailors (S31) or boats (S33), wherever that may be
- Marinas (S07; S17), pontoons (S20), and boatyards (S36), likely where the boat is kept
- Anchorages (S24), and specifically Studland Bay (S15/S28; S23; S25)
- Pubs or bars near the water (S03; S05)

- In a regatta when sailing as a group to the start line of a race (S02), and in places visited for sailing championships (S37)

While the most common answers involved particular places or sailing clubs, the above responses show that the location of community feeling can vary greatly. A few people gave explanations for their choice, notably that people were friendly, supportive, and willing to advise or help each other out (S06; S18; S20; S31). It would have been valuable to more generally ask why respondents gave their answers, possibly through a specific follow-up question. In the absence of this information, the rest of this section will rely on conversations with participants. Despite also showing a large degree of variation, the descriptions which participants gave suggest that, for some individuals at least, there may be a shared logic behind these different answers.

## 8.2: Spontaneity

One common thread was how places and networks both facilitate the spontaneous creation of new relationships, which can quickly deepen and become potentially long-lasting. An example of this process was given by P02, in a description of how sailing allows relationships to quickly expand from a chance meeting:

*It's sort of something where you go from sort of first contact with people to engaging with them a lot more quite quickly potentially, I'd say... Say sailing out of Plymouth off Rame Head, I've taken a picture of another boat that's come sailing past me very quickly, just because. I've then happened to see, I've then ended up sort of twenty yards away from them in Falmouth Harbour, and I've rowed over and said "Yeah happy to send you that photo at some point", they've said "We're going to the pub do you want to come?". Couple of days later we both end up the Fal and I end up having breakfast with them, and then yeah, sort of yeah still in touch with them a couple of years later. So yeah, and that sort of thing happens more in sailing than in other areas I'd say, somehow. (P02a)*

At the risk of repetition, the story above begins with an initial crossing of paths while sailing, before a chance meeting in the same harbour. Having previously taken a photograph of the other boat, P02 acts on this chance to connect, something that appears quite common as taking a picture of your own boat is understandably difficult. Given wider topics we discussed, it is likely that P02 took this photo because the boat was "unusual" in some way, from which he often assumed the owner might be an interesting and like-minded person. The recipients respond with an invitation to join them at the pub, which could perhaps have provided the natural conclusion. However, they again meet by chance on the River Fal, presumably while anchoring near one another, and end up breakfasting together.

The ability to generate a relationship from chance encounters was valued by P02 as something which makes sailing distinct. He compared the above situation to that of wider life, where he barely knew his neighbours

despite living within 100 yards of them for over 3 years. Connecting with others in this way relies on both opportunity and mutual inclination, but does seem eminently possible. In P02's opinion, spontaneity was also supported by geography. He later explained that meeting people can be quite organic because the combination of wind direction and natural constraints mean there are "only so many places to go". As such, "you'll end up potentially meeting people you know without ever, without necessarily planning it at all, it just happens." (P02a)

This view of sailing as allowing for spontaneous connection was shared by other participants as well, though inflected in different ways. For P10, it was the concentration of fellow sailors in Cowes on the Isle of Wight which facilitated spontaneous opportunities. This could be further channelled through sailing clubs, where people regularly invited each other to join as crew for weekend races, for example, allowing for exposure to different kinds of sailing and the chance to build new relationships. Sailing clubs were also highlighted for this reason by P07, for whom "inevitable" invitations to join others on cruising weekends prompted him to shift from lake to coastal sailing.

Similarly, P04 explained how boat maintenance could provide a base for meeting others. If he did not feel like sailing on a particular day, he might still move the boat alongside a pontoon to "tinker", completing various odd jobs. At the same location there might be 20 other boats present, with 20 other boat owners willing to chat. While this could just be a relaxed way to socialise, it also held the potential to quickly escalate:

*You never get anything done because you just spend the whole time chatting, and it's very social. But, at the same time, you share skills and experiences and then you find yourself in three months as a result of that heading off to France with a couple of other boats. So it's a very social thing sailing. And that's, you know, it's an incredible thing.*

One participant did however suggest how features of their boat can also place a limit on spontaneity. P05, who owned a large bilge-keel yacht, explained how they have to turn down impromptu invitations to trips by fellow sailing club members because their specific requirements are not well understood:

*I'll say, 'Because you're in a boat with a lifting keel. You only need two feet of water to get where you're going, you know. I need nine feet (P: Laughs). Not compatible.'* (P05)

It is not just that P05's boat is unusual, but that members of sailing clubs often assume a similar level of access to the surrounding area, a shared factor which might usually help to facilitate spontaneous group trips.

One other observation is how boats might allow people to be part of spontaneous communities while keeping a level of separation and independence. Across a number of interviews, turning up to a place in a

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boat meant being able to interact with others but also having a place of your own to return to at leisure. P04 described this as having “your own little homes in the Marina.” As such, boats seem to enable participants to mediate their level of interaction with others. They support spontaneous relationships while also providing a private place on the water. How this dual role is valued could be something to explore further in the future.

### 8.3: Shared mindset

While certain places were seen to bring individuals into contact, the reason why these interactions could then develop into deeper relationships was partly because the people involved were expected to share a similar mindset. This point was explicitly made by P10 in how most of her friends at university came through sailing because she finds sailors share a similar outlook, humour, and practical way of thinking. These ways of thinking which sailing is seen to develop were discussed in the earlier section, ‘Learning and Personal Development’. Similarly, P07 told a story of how he took a training course with other friendly participants, during which they decided to hire a boat together for a weekend. This then opened more doors in the future. As with the sailing club, building these sorts of relationships was a matter of “putting yourself in situations where you’re with the right sort of people, the people that can help you learn those sorts of things” (P07).

However, a similar or shared mindset among members is not always seen to come naturally. For one, P09 highlighted how it relates to the sailing community having been built by “a certain demographic”, while being inaccessible to many due to the resources needed to start. In a different way, P07 explained that it took time for him to build an appreciation of how others think and act:

*When you join a yacht club, you suddenly realize that there are a lot of people there with very, very different skills. And you have to fit in, sort of thing. And you have to listen to them. And you have to, to some extent, obey their rules. Even if you think, 'Oh God', you know. But actually, it's surprising, once you do that, and you realize you've learned something new, you've actually got a new skill, then then that sort of builds up. (P07)*

The description by P07 above also highlights how he values the learning opportunities that come from interacting with others through organisations like a yacht club. This is despite initial frustrations over accommodating to a specific way of doing things. The ability to learn from one another, and to give and receive advice and support, was another major way in which community feeling was understood.

### 8.4: Mutual support

For a couple of participants, a large part of feeling part of a community was using their position to help others out. This included taking others out on their boat as a learning opportunity (P05) or offering advice and labour (P04). It was equally described in the other direction, with opportunities to learn from others or

to be helped when stuck with a problem. Advice might come from members at a sailing club, or through interactions with other individuals in the same place a boat is kept, like the boatyard or the marina.

For one participant, P08, this support came primarily through online groups. It was here that she gained advice on the sort of boat to buy as a beginner, as well as on eco-friendly alternatives to antifouling. Connections made online could move offline as well: P08 related how her online posting led to the creation of a friendship with somebody living locally, who then came to survey their boat for free and saved them hundreds of pounds. Particularly for those who self-described as trying to boat on a tight budget, like P04 as well, a large part of community building was learning and teaching each other how to do things cheaply, and potentially using any specific skills to offer each other services that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive.

One observation which would be interesting to explore further is how these community relationships were sometimes framed in terms of family. In explaining how people are willing to give each other help and advice, P04 described boating as giving you “100 granddads, who will all show you a different way of taking the screw out, or how to varnish.” There are associated attributes of ‘granddads’ at play in this description, like having an extensive practical knowledge while being committed to their own personal way of doing things. However, the metaphor might also imply a familial level of closeness and willingness to help one another. In that sense, it could recall P08’s description of the man she bought her boat from— “I’ve adopted him as my granddad because he’s just, he’s just so sweet. He’s so so nice”—as well as S27’s description of her all-woman crew as her “sailing family”.

### 8.5: Discussion

Of all the different aspects to community, it was the potential for unexpected and rapidly developing interaction that participants claimed was most unique, as well as the general willingness of fellow boaters to help each other out and to give generously of their time and expertise. Various aspects of sailing, in particular, were seen to bring individuals into contact with like-minded people in an organic way. This could be through features of particular places, like visiting appropriate anchorages for the weather conditions or living in a “sailing town” (P10). It could also be through networks like membership of a sailing club, or through keeping boats in the same place as others. Regardless of how people initially met, the likelihood of a shared interest and mindset could then prompt relationships to develop in a way that seems much quicker than in wider life. This can lead to opportunities for fantastic shared experiences and long-term friendships. Even if it does not, the small-scale interactions may also be appreciated for their own sake.

The above conversations with participants also suggested some of the work that goes in to feeling part of a community. This can include taking the time to learn and adapt to other people’s way of thinking, asking for advice, and helping others through whatever support participants feel able to offer. It can also include

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participating in shared activities, like cruising weekends, races, and social trips to pubs and restaurants. Further research on this topic could more specifically ask how people maintain their feeling of involvement in their community. Among other topics, this could include: 1) who they go boating with; 2) who they talk to about boating-related matters; 3) how they keep up-to-date with boating-related news; and 4) what social events they attend.

## 9: Overview

This report has aimed to show a bit about how people think about boating as an activity, the wider boating community, and themselves as boaters. The nature of the research method meant that there was not an exact set of questions which participants were asked, and conversations flowed in different directions. As such, writing-up has been a process of looking for connections between the narratives of participants, and further grounding these using survey responses and general observations from online social media groups. This has consequences for understanding how different sections are integrated, as well as suggesting avenues for future research, both of which are discussed below.

### 9.1: Connections and overlaps

The key topics of this report came out of conversations with participants, rather than being suggested in advance by wider literature or previous research. Although connections have been made, there are other ways in which individual narratives could have been divided, and there are other frameworks that could have connected participants together. It therefore seems valuable to highlight how different sections of this report can be linked to one another.

For example, the section on types of boater highlighted how differences within the boating community might be linked to ideas about responsibility and care for other people. It was elsewhere suggested that these norms might be developed during the process of learning to sail, linking histories of learning with the way people think about other boaters. Moreover, the idea that learning to sail generates a similar kind of mindset can perhaps underpin the spontaneity of relationships that many believe makes the community unique, as people can connect with one another very quickly through the expectation of a shared outlook on life.

Another point of connection is in how many people believed that boating provides unique opportunities for development and personal growth. The power given to boating experiences for self-development can perhaps be linked with how boating was seen as distinctly different from regular life. This kind of separation should not, however, be automatically assumed. As explored in the section on felt experience, this distinction was framed through particular sensory and mental aspects. There is an existing literature on this sort of situation, where experiences in 'liminal' places beyond the boundaries of normal life can be sites of significant personal change, allowing participants to 're-author' their lives (see Andrews and Roberts 2012; Varley 2011). The idea of learning when pushed beyond normal life might also be linked to some participants' memorable experiences, and the ways in which they narrativize the challenges they have overcome.

Some memorable experiences could also be linked to the ways people thought about their own lifecourse. Specific journeys could be meaningful because of something they meant in the context of participants'

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personal development or wider life history. This could, for example, be their first time completing an overnight passage, or perhaps a voyage that was aspired to when younger. Similarly, for individuals who bought a boat in the hopes of facilitating a particular kind of life, for them or their families, value might be placed in the moments when those hopes are realised, like “Happy children on beaches or crabbing on harbour pontoons” (S22). What is memorable or valuable could therefore be connected to what people initially hoped to achieve by becoming involved in boating.

## 9.2: Limitations and future research

While specific areas for further research have been mentioned throughout, it is worth drawing these together with some general statements. The first is that this research has identified potentially meaningful topics from a range of qualitative responses. It has therefore functioned as a scoping study, and future research could follow up on each section in a more extensive manner. A more structured approach, with a larger sample base, could perhaps identify whether these topics vary along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, residence, and other factors. For example, both Roberts (2019) and Jennings (2005) have written about the gendered nature of boating knowledge and commitment, in their respective studies of liveaboard river boaters and long-term ocean cruisers. It is likely that similar factors are present among recreational coastal boaters as well, but this report has not been able to comment on these in any detail.

More generally, this project did not involve any participants who listed motorboating as their main form of being on the water. Any further research should actively target individuals who own or use motorboats, from small and fast ‘runabouts’ to large cruising yachts. Similarly, the only participants who were not owners of boats larger than dinghies were P09 and P10, both of whom were at university. Future research could benefit from including adults who are not boat owners, such as those who hope to own a boat in the future, those who generally prefer to rent or crew for others, and those who used to own a boat but may have sold it due to changing interests or external pressures, for example.

Beyond these limitations of the participant sample, there are other issues which future research could also address. The first is in how this research relied upon participants’ own representations of their activity. This is not a limitation in its own right, as it can reveal a lot about how personal values and social norms are conceptualised. However, what people say does not necessarily match onto what they do, and there can be a large separation between ideal norms and actual actions (see Holy and Stuchlik 1983). For example, an awareness of potential risks may be a value associated with being a good boater, but it does not mean that participants always plan their routes with this in mind or take all appropriate safety measures.

In an ideal world, it might be possible to address the above by spending extended time with and among boaters in person. A more ethnographic approach could involve crewing on different boats, trading stories in

a pub by the harbour, spending time helping other boaters at a boatyard, and generally being in the places where interactions happen. While this is a very time-intensive method, there are other options as well. Various creative methods, for example, might get closer to participants' actual activity than interviews or surveys. This could involve asking individuals to keep a diary of their trips, or to take photos or recordings when out at sea or doing works on their boat. More fully observing and participating in boating-related groups online could also be an option, as could an analysis of online blogs and video diaries.

As an aside, this project also looked at the potential for using boardgames as a method to understand boating, although there was not time to include this in detail within the report. A second interview with P02, who was himself a keen gamer, asked about boating within the framework of trying to create a representative boardgame. This allowed for a detailed conversation about what the purpose or aim of activities were, what a good journey might look like, and the various factors which a boater must consider. It highlighted, for example, how P02 saw boating as always containing a racing element:

*You are always racing to an extent. Whether that is a competitive, properly competitive thing, or just the fact that you need to get around this headland or into that harbour entrance before the tide turns, or it starts getting dark, or you get hungry. (P02b)*

While P02 was unusual in being both a keen sailor and a board gamer, the latter is not a pre-requisite for using these sorts of methods. For example, Bankford and Craven (2020) have developed a research method and toolkit whereby groups can design games together, in-person, to reach deep understandings of complex systems. Given that many participants described boating as a complex experience, with multiple different parts, this kind of detailed group work could be a good method to employ.

Finally, various sections of this report suggested that there could be deeper historical roots to present-day situations. Historical factors were also directly referenced by some participants. For example, P02 thought there had been a decline in community feeling over time, while P04 referenced the reduction of "people that have grown up around boats", which has left thousands of older boats to slowly fall apart rather than be maintained. Some boaters also enjoyed how boating connected them to a maritime history, through maintaining a skill which is "a little bit of an anachronism" (P02b), or by keeping a classic boat with decades of history (P03). A historical analysis of the boating experience could be valuable in identifying how certain features have developed over time, such as ideas about freedom and its maritime context. It could also highlight the kinds of changes that boaters may have seen during their lifetimes, and how these may be related to present-day attitudes.

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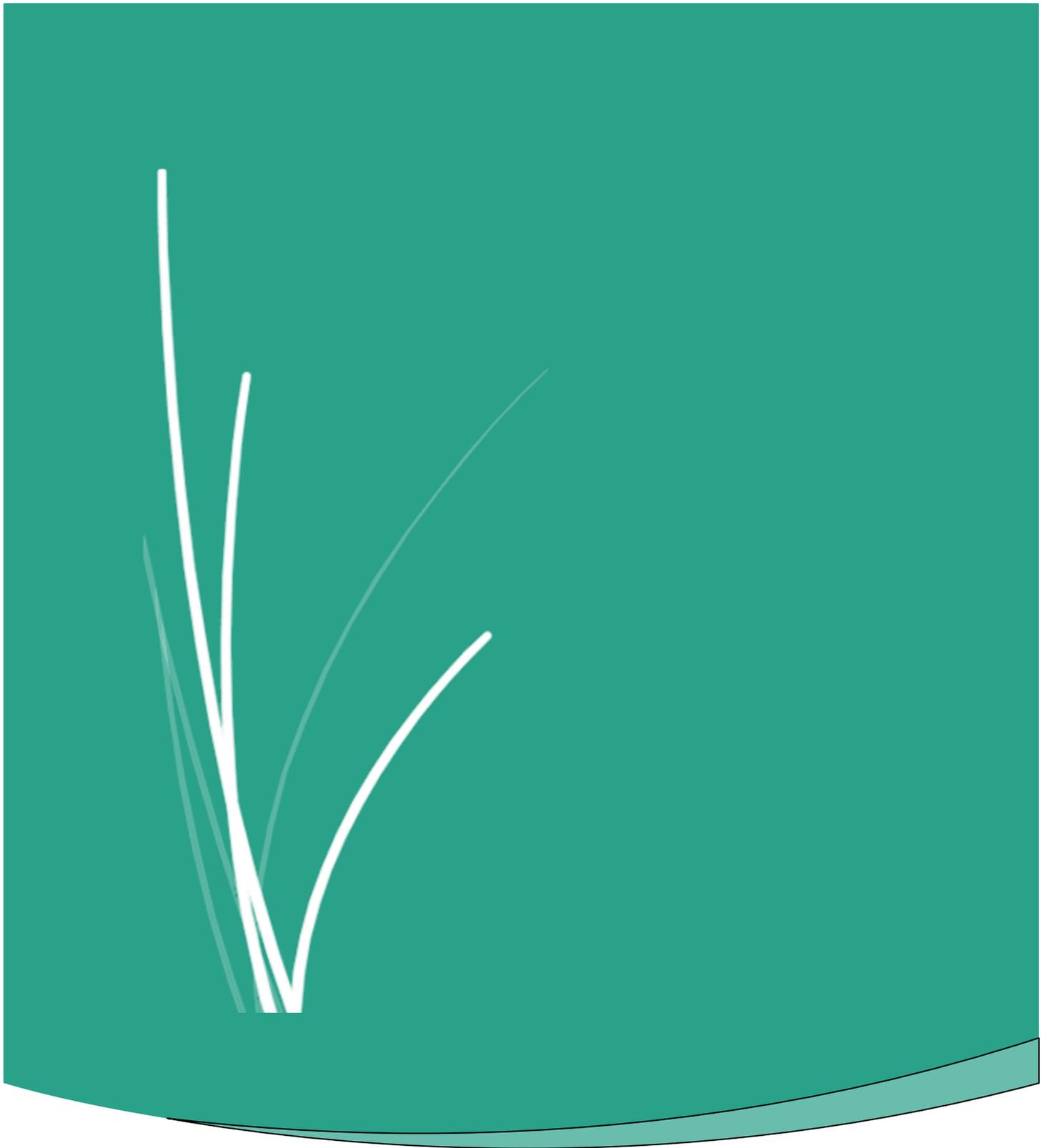
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## Appendix A: Survey questions

- 1) What motivated you to first become involved in boating? How has your level of involvement changed over time?
- 2) Do you have any particularly memorable trips you've taken? If so, why does this trip stand out?
- 3) Is there a particular moment, within a journey, that stands out to you as special or distinctive? Why?
- 4) Where (related to boating) have you found the greatest sense of community?
- 5) What are your plans for the future? How have these changed in the last year?
- 6) Describe a typical trip you might usually take:
- 7) What boating-related skills or knowledge are you currently learning? How are you doing this?
- 8) What does boating offer you that nothing else does?
- 9) What other activity is boating most similar to? Why?
- 10) If possible, please attach an image that is meaningful to you when thinking about boating. This could be a photograph of your favourite place to visit on the coast, for example, or works underway on your boat. Questions on this image will follow. (Images will not be shared and will be securely held by the researcher until Jan 2024)
- 11) What is happening in this image? When was it taken? What made you choose this image?
- 12) Are there any questions you think could be included in the future to better understand the experience of coastal boating?



The ***LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES: Reducing and Mitigating Erosion and Disturbance Impacts affecting the Seabed*** project (LIFE18 NAT/UK000039) runs from July 2019 – October 2023 and will improve the condition of five SACs between Essex and Isles of Scilly. This will be achieved by restoration, demonstration and reducing recreational pressures. Promoting awareness, communications and inspiring better care of sensitive seabed habitats will be key.



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