



Article

Windjammer: Finding Purpose and Meaning on a Tall Ship Adventure

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Abstract: The Windjammer project started in 2018 as a social entrepreneurship program in Norway for adolescents at risk of social drop-out and societal exclusion. While the effects on society of such programs are difficult to measure, aspects such as perceived meaning in life are largely overlooked in the literature. This study explored wellbeing and the processes of creating meaning among adolescents at risk during a one-month tall ship adventure. Three methodological approaches were used. First, psychological and demographic data from the Windjammer participants (n = 122) were compared to a national adolescent survey (Ungdata, n = 793,879) serving as a comparison group. Second, using sensory ethnography, the sailing experience of seven adolescents from one adventure was explored in depth through interviews while onboard the ship. Third, a mixed-methods approach was used to further explore three individual adolescents' experiences of the adventure. Overall findings show that Windjammers experienced life as less meaningful than the general adolescent population. Interviewed Windjammers talked about transformative experiences, although quantitative data showed a slight decrease in meaning following the adventure. Overall, the tall ship adventure was found to involve four overarching themes: commitment, social wellbeing, familiarization with seamanship, and self-acceptance.

Keywords: meaning in life; tall ship adventure; wellbeing; satisfaction; adolescents



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1. Introduction

Could participating in a tall ship adventure affect perceived meaning in life among youth at risk? Experiencing meaning in life is important for humans. It is said that humans are meaning-making individuals (Devoe 2012; Park 2010), and studies have shown that people report greater levels of meaning when things are understandable and coherent (King and Hicks 2021; Martela and Steger 2016). This tendency for creating meaning is important when constructing a personal life story—an identity (McAdams 2001), and it is shaped by four basic needs for meaning: a sense of purpose in life, a feeling of efficacy, feeling that our actions have value, and a positive self-worth (Baumeister 1991; Sommer et al. 2013).

Narrative identity creation is found to involve cognitive, personality, and developmental processes, where humans create a coherent (life) story to make sense of themselves and their place in the world (see McAdams 2001, for more details). In earlier times, adolescents were sent out at sea, with tall ships, war ships, or cargo boats, to “grow up”, learn, or escape poverty. These experiences were tough and required the young to deal with life’s brutal reality—at sea. Finding meaning and purpose in tough conditions has been shown to affect survival, as documented by Frankl (2006) in his book “Man’s search for meaning” written following his stay in German concentration camps during the Second World War. This ability to make sense of events is an inborn tendency, and, according to gestalt principles, our mind creates a coherent whole through filling in missing information. These

same perceptual and cognitive principles may also be operating on more abstract levels, providing a sense of predictability, lawfulness, and order in life. When facing trauma and adversity, the ability to create new meaning in life can even lead to post-traumatic growth (Copley and Carney 2020; Jayawickreme et al. 2021; Kashdan and Kane 2011; Wang et al. 2019).

Yet, the concept of the meaning has also sparked great controversy in fields such as philosophy, psychology, and the human sciences. King and Hicks (2021) made a distinction between the meaning of life and the meaning in life. This distinction appears as a philosophical question (Næss 2009), exploring the limits of ontology and epistemology. The meaning of life is traditionally understood as an overall, profound sense of the value of one's life, what we are here to accomplish, and our life's mission—what philosophers and thinkers have spent time pondering. The meaning in life is explained as a subjective experience or a mental state which is less profound. Meaning in life can be understood as involving three facets, including comprehension (how we understand our world and existence; if it makes sense, as described above), purpose (if our life is guided by some intrinsic goals), and existential mattering (if our life matters to someone; if we will be remembered or leave an imprint when we die) (King and Hicks 2021). According to these authors, social relationship is the context in which these three facets exist. Furthermore, positive affect, a hallmark of hedonic wellbeing, is found to be associated with meaning in life (King and Hicks 2021). Yet, meaning in life is also considered part of the eudaimonic wellbeing conceptualization (Ryff and Singer 2008), as it denotes an innate need for realizing one's potential. Hence, these issues address controversy over the concept of meaning in or of life and is yet to be resolved. Below, meaning in life is used when referring to how we make sense of our lives.

The question of meaning in life may be of particular importance for adolescents as this is a vulnerable time, defined by the transition from childhood to adulthood activating issues related to identity, personal values, existential mattering, significance, education, mastery, friendship, and independence. Studies have shown that having a sense of meaning and purpose in life is crucial during adolescence (Krok 2018), particularly for adolescents' experience of wellbeing (Krok 2018; Lin and Shek 2019), with autonomy, connectedness, optimism, and competency emerging as defining attributes (Avedissian and Alayan 2021). Seeing how important meaning in life is for human functioning in general, and for adolescents in particular, experiencing meaning in life may be essential for adolescents at risk. The importance of meaning in life for wellbeing among adolescents at risk of social drop-out and societal exclusion is the focus of the current article.

2. Sail Ship Experiences and Wellbeing

The idea of spending time at sea to experience personal growth is not new. In the early 1940s, the Outward-Bound movement started offering four-week adventures for youths as a contribution to character building (Freeman 2011). Later, different traditions developed experiential learning programs for youth at risk of social and societal exclusion with a goal of personal growth, later becoming known as outdoor therapy programs such as wilderness therapy and adventure programs. A literature review on youth and adventure programs (Deane and Harré 2014) identified several programs that enhance self-concept, connection, skills and competencies, behavior, outlook, and attitude. While many studies addressed the overall effects of adventure intervention programs, less research has explored the processes arising during such adventures, such as being part of the sailing crew (Allison and Von Wald 2013). An anthropological investigation of sailing trainees identified shared responsibilities, task synchronization, and time by oneself as important characteristics of the tall ship experience offering opportunities for transformative experiences (Montserrat 2020). Both the learning process of becoming a sailor and the environment within the ship and at sea make this an opportunity for growth. The idea of exploring meaning in life as a facet of wellbeing during a tall ship expedition, thus, seems plausible.

The idea of transferring learning from experiences in nature to self is developed in the field of experiential learning. This has inspired an array of adventure programs offered in blue, green, white, and altitude environments. One of the critical voices from this field argues that experiential learning and self-directed learning is personal; hence, generalization is difficult as all individuals have different starting points (Zepke and Leach 2002). Moreover, the stories we tell about ourselves change according to our purposes as meaning making always occurs within a context. To develop a richer understanding of meaning making, we should understand the value of experiential education to be emotional, spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual (Zepke and Leach 2002). Meaning making within the frames of experiential learning, thus, needs to include a rich approach to embodied, social, and spiritual contexts with multidimensional layers. Tall ships may offer an array of possibilities to include such complex contexts.

Examining the spiritual aspects, nature is an excellent source of awe experiences (Anderson et al. 2018), and tall ship adventures offer great opportunities to explore both experiential learning and potential awe experiences in the blue element. Awe experiences are related to the concept of meaning in life in complex ways, and happiness induced from awe experiences is found to have a positive indirect effect on meaning in life (Rivera et al. 2020). In particular, two aspects of awe are essential for understanding the concept: (1) perceived vastness, and (2) a need for accommodation (Keltner and Haidt 2003). Perceived vastness is typically experienced when being on a vessel at sea with no land in sight. The need for accommodation occurs when learning to steer and sail a tall ship, which are important elements of all sail training programs. Many happy moments also invite awe experiences, such as watching the starry heaven, experiencing high waves, and encounters with seabirds and sea animals. The tall ship experience, including living and working aboard the ship, has some special qualities that invite meaning making as a spiritual experience, beyond the physical, emotional, and social aspects.

In a systematic review on the effects of modern sailing programs for youth, results showed a transformation in the social and personal spheres following the sail training programs (Schijf et al. 2017). More specifically, participating youth reported changed feelings of overall self-worth and ability to form social relationships and create friendships with other youth, evidencing the tall ship experience as a character-building process (Marshall et al. 2020). Sailing and living on a tall ship for an extended period has been found to be more related to eudaimonic than hedonic wellbeing, with the spirituality dimension proposed to be essential (Jirásek and Hurych 2019). A quasi-experimental design, measuring participants before, on the last day of, and three months after a tall ship experience, found small effect sizes of competence and the social dimension from prior to completion of the sailing adventure, but this effect was only temporary (Capurso and Borsci 2013). These findings point to the challenges of capturing what factors or elements of the tall ship experience have long-lasting building effects. An art-based approach to tall ship experiences reported a strong “here and now” perspective, such as experiences of time, place, and relationship with nature to be of essence (Pipere et al. 2020), thus addressing the process of the adventure. As the amount of data on and research methods for capturing tall ship experiences are limited, there is a need for more in-depth research. Factors needing further exploration include socio-demographic information, as well as elements defining the “unique nature” of sail training (Schijf et al. 2017).

3. The Windjammer Project

“Windjammer” is a private Norwegian social entrepreneurship program directed at vulnerable youth 16 to 26 years old, who have dropped out from school, struggle to obtain or keep employment, or are at risk for drop-out behaviors. Participants are typically recruited to the program by governmental agencies and are offered a 30-day sailing adventure as a “Windjammer”. Participation is partly state-sponsored and partly privately sponsored, enabling at-risk youth to join the adventure free of charge. During the current study, the tall ship offered three Windjammer adventures yearly, recruiting up to 45 adolescents per

adventure to live and work as part of the crew sailing this traditional fully rigged tall ship. Adolescents work alongside professional crew and volunteering adults and are divided into three working shifts of approximately 8–12 individuals, each operating two 4 h shifts per 24 h (the 00–04 a.m. and 12–4 p.m. shift, the 4–8 a.m. and 4–8 p.m. shift, or the 8 a.m.–12 p.m. and 8 p.m.–12 a.m. shift). The volunteering adults are provided free room and board in return for serving as crew, role models, and social/practical support for the adolescents. Adolescents and volunteers are trained to do security rounds on the ship, watching for dangers at sea when performing lookout duty, steering the ship, navigating, climbing the rig to operate sails, and to pull and fasten ropes. All tasks involve learning practical seamanship and are guided and led by professional tall ship crew. Windjammers sleep, eat, and live in a crowded area under deck (“banjer”). Cooperation and teamwork are essential for operating the tall ship, as well as for living together peacefully on a crowded ship. In addition to participating in the month-long adventure, adolescents and volunteering adults participate in a preparatory 3-day onboarding module prior to sailing as well as a 2-day off-boarding module upon return.

For this study, three research questions were formulated:

1. Is “meaning in life” perceived differently among Windjammers and not-at-risk youth? (Ungdata)
2. What processes are involved and activated during a tall ship adventure?
3. How does a month at sea affect Windjammers’ life stories and their initial sense of meaning?

4. Materials and Methods

Three methodological approaches were used in this study. By combining quantitative and qualitative data (mixed methods), we used deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches to explore and enhance our understanding of relevant phenomena.

First, using a quantitative approach (deductive) we compared youth at risk (Windjammers; $n = 122$ at preboarding) to the general Norwegian youth population (Ungdata; $n = 793,879$) on meaning in life and variables related to physical and mental health. Windjammers came from different voyages and data were collected for almost two years. Thirty-nine Windjammers also provided 3 month post-adventure data; however, these samples differed, preventing the use of longitudinal analyses.

Secondly, a qualitative approach (inductive) was used to explore ongoing processes and experiences related to changed life stories and the creation of meaning during one of the 2022 Windjammer voyages. Inspired by a sensory ethnographic approach (Pink 2015), described as an “art of attentiveness” (Vittelone et al. 2021), which draws attention to features of everyday life that are often taken for granted (Calvey 2021), co-participation by the researcher was essential when collecting qualitative data to identify core aspects of the sailing experience. A combination of observations, sensory experiences, and interviews with seven Windjammers during sailing provided rich material for interpretation.

Thirdly, a mixed approach (abductive) was used to further explore the sailing experience of three of the seven interviewed Windjammers. These three individuals provided both self-reported quantitative (pre and 3 months post voyage) and interview data. Using mixed methods enabled an exploration and investigation of these individuals’ development related to their self-narratives and experienced meaning in life, from the beginning of their sailing experience, through the voyage, to self-reported experiences three months post adventure.

5. Data Collection, Samples, Measures, and Methodological Considerations

5.1. Windjammer

Windjammer participants are recruited through different governmental agencies (Oppfølgingstjenesten (OT), or NAV), from local high school coordinators, or from personal application to the program through the Windjammer web portal. Eligibility is living in Norway with a valid passport, being between 16–25 years old, not active in any educa-

tional or training program, and not currently working, thus being at risk of dropping out from available (competence-enhancing) activities. Eligible adolescents may have lost their motivation, will, or ability to complete upper level/higher education or need a change to regain motivation and energy to pursue personal goals.

When planning the Windjammer research project, the Ungdata dataset was used as a basis for selecting items to enable a comparison of Windjammer participants to the overall Norwegian adolescent population. To keep the number of questions manageable, many relevant items were omitted (e.g., related to delinquent behavior, life satisfaction, sexual behavior, violence, sport participation, and bullying). Items assumed sensitive to capture anticipated change following the tall ship adventure were selected for inclusion in the study.

The Windjammer program is mostly known in the southeastern part of Norway, but there seems to be an increased interest for the program within OT and NAV in all parts of Norway. Participants come from various geographical and economic backgrounds, and struggle with different challenges, from developmental issues, such as ADHD/Asperger, to mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and drug addiction, or simply just not fitting into the society's demands. Recruiting participants with immigrant backgrounds has been challenging and is a current aim for the program.

For the current study, quantitative data from participants on voyages 7–12 were used, with $n = 122$ providing onboarding data and $n = 39$ providing 3-month post-adventure data. One voyage was studied in depth; from this voyage, 28 participants provided onboarding data, 6 provided 3-month data, and 7 provided interview data. Participants signed a written informed consent before completing the first digital questionnaire, and interview participants signed a separate informed consent before the interview.

5.2. Ungdata: Comparison Group

Ungdata (www.ungdata.no; accessed on 1 March 2023) is a national data collection scheme on adolescent health and wellbeing in Norway. It is the most comprehensive source of information on adolescent life and wellbeing on a national and municipal level, and it covers areas such as health, leisure, relationship with parents and friends, wellbeing, school issues, alcohol, and drug use, bullying, and sex, as well as self-esteem, meaning in life, depression, and anxiety. Adolescents are invited to participate in the Ungdata survey during school hours, and data have been collected regularly since 2010. The current Ungdata datafile ($n = 793,879$; Ungdata 2010–2021) was obtained in February 2023 and served as a baseline to which data from Windjammer participants were compared.

5.3. Quantitative Data

The statement “I feel that what I do in life is meaningful” was used to capture meaning in life, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from “very true” to “not at all true”. Other items measured mental health (anxiety and depression; marked d^* and a^* in Table 1, respectively), taken from the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (Derogatis 1982; Derogatis et al. 1974) and Depressive Mood Inventory (Kandel 1982). The item “felt lonely” (u^* in Table 1) was developed and included as part of the Young-in-Norway/Oslo studies, and was later used also in the Ungdata study, while the item addressing thoughts about the future (f^* in Table 1) was taken from older Ungdata studies from the 1980s and 1990s. Items addressing self-worth (s^* in Table 1) were taken from a revised form of the “Global Self Worth” subscale of the instrument “The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, SPPA (Harter 1988; Wichstrøm 1995). The source of the items measuring happiness/unhappiness with certain areas of life (h^* in Table 1) is unknown, while items related to mastery (e^* in Table 1) were taken from the General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem 1995).¹ Although items pertaining to the use of drugs and alcohol, health-related complaints, friendships, educational plans, and mental health were included in the Windjammer research project, they are not further described as they were not used in the current study.

5.4. Qualitative Data: Sensory Ethnography

Acknowledging the multisensory dimension of experiences is an important starting point when exploring data related to adolescents' experiences during a tall ship adventure. Sensing and thinking are highly related, and, upon entering the tall ship, bodily experiences emerge at the center of attention. For this reason, a sensory ethnographic approach (Pink 2015) was chosen as the methodological framework for this qualitative study using a sensory lens to develop a more expressive and experimental narrative (Calvey 2021) and, hence, providing a rich foundation for analysis. We believe this qualitative method to be helpful to gain insights in processes during the adventure as these insights would otherwise remain "invisible" and non-conscious. The sensory ethnographer in this study (author 2) was a skilled researcher with long-term experience from outdoor education, with sailing and practical seamanship as particular areas of interest. In addition, the researcher was trained in positive psychology. Her practical and theoretical background provided a solid base from which an exploration of if and how experiences and situations on a tall ship provide growth and wellbeing can be undertaken. She participated alongside the Windjammers and fellow volunteering adults on the 30-day voyage.

5.5. Observations

With special attention to sensory experiences, the ethnographer participated in the daily routines on the tall ship. She had a double role on the voyage—being a researcher but also functioning as an essential part of the crew conducting practical seamanship and being a support and adult role model for the participating adolescents. Doing sensory ethnography required the researcher to be an involved and participating observer, with sensory experiences of steering the ship, performing lookout duty and safety rounds under deck, climbing the rig, and pulling ropes, all providing important experiences for understanding what a tall ship sailing adventure feels like. Important experiences also include sleeping in a hammock in the crowded crew area under deck and being a part of the working shift crew doing two four-hour shifts daily. The researcher was on the 12–4 a.m./p.m. shift.

5.6. Interviews, Sample, and Procedure

After three weeks of sailing, still far out at sea, the informants and researcher were becoming familiar with sailing. The researcher considered this a good time for conducting interviews to collect personal reflections from the Windjammer participants on the multisensory experience of being at sea. Recruiting informants was challenging. First, the daily schedule on a ship was divided into three separate working shifts. The three shifts could develop their own dynamic, and, as they worked and slept at separate times from the others shifts, finding a time to conduct interviews was challenging. Shift members were needed during their work hours, and, in their leisure time, they needed to prioritize sleep, food, and recovery. Energy surplus was necessary as the working shifts could be demanding both physically and mentally, especially in cold and wet weather. Hence, the interviewer needed to be sensitive to participants' need for restitution. Secondly, finding privacy and a convenient physical space for the interviews was important, but not easy on a small and crowded ship. The captain's saloon, the only such space, was the main meeting room for all purposes on the tall ship, and availability was very limited. Yet, it was made available for the interviews. Thirdly, as the saloon was in the very rear of the ship, the experience of waves was enhanced here. This was another reason interviews were best conducted during the last part of the adventure, as this room created an intensified feeling of seasickness. However, after three weeks at sea, seasickness was no longer a problem.

Seven informants were invited to be interviewed. To ensure that their experiences were representative of a typical tall ship adventure, the informants were selected across teams and crew members, from all three working shifts. However, trying to select a representative sample of the Windjammers was not a goal, and demographic and personal background information was not available for the sensory ethnographer at this stage of

research. As mentioned, conducting interviews were challenging, in terms of finding time, recruiting participants from different working shifts that may be working or sleeping when the researcher was available, and possible sickness (both seasickness and other conditions such as the common cold or headaches). All approached interview candidates agreed to participate, regardless of their struggles earlier during the voyage. However, some Windjammers were not asked to participate in interviews for several reasons. Participation was not to be a burden to the Windjammers for ethical reasons. Some were not approached due to personal struggles, while informants who were sick, had headaches, or felt exhausted—behavior that was observed by the researcher—were not invited despite the researcher's interest in interviewing them. Furthermore, a few Windjammers wanted to avoid their responsibilities by asking for sick leave from the medic, minimizing their physical effort, or leaving the adventure all together. These were not approached, although observations of some of these Windjammers indicated a proudness for joining the voyage through a wish to share the experience with family, employers, teachers, or friends. By week 3 or 4, the typical Windjammer was positive and engaged, despite the hard work, both physically and mentally, particularly during the first two weeks of sailing. As such, the interview sample obtained is believed to represent the typical Windjammer group. Stopping at seven informants was a pragmatic choice as the researcher considered the last days on the voyage as less optimal for conducting interviews. During these final days, the work schedule changed, and common activities such as team games, sea bathing, cleaning the ship, and a final celebration dinner with captain and the crew was arranged.

The seven Windjammers accepting the invitation to be interviewed signed informed consent. They were informed that all information would be anonymized, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty and for no reason, with all corresponding interview data being deleted. The sample was recruited from all three crew teams, and all participants were given fictitious names to ensure anonymity. From the 8–12 a.m./p.m. team three male informants participated (William, 22, Robert, 22, and Peter, 16 years). One male (Fred, 25 years) and one female (Anna, 18 years) informant participated from the 12–4 a.m./p.m. team. From the 4–8 a.m./p.m. team, two males participated (Paul, 18 and Eric, 19 years). Few female participants were available for interviews due to sickness and other challenges, making it difficult to recruit from a balanced gender perspective. The interview sample, thus, consisted of 86% males. In general, male participants were overrepresented in the Windjammer program, with 62% versus 32% for males and females, respectively, and a mean age of 18 years.

The aim of the Interviews was to explore what Windjammers learned about themselves through participating in the adventure. Interviews lasted between 29.08 min and 59.08 min, with a mean length of 38 min. The length of the interviews was determined by the flow of the conversation, with some informants being more descriptive in their responses to open-ended questions than others.

Inspired by sensory ethnography, the ethnographical interviews were not conducted using an interview guide. Rather, the interviewer tried to be sensitive to the experiences of the informants and invited them to a conversation around descriptions of their sensory experiences. Very often, questions started by "How did you experience . . .?", "What did you think . . .?", or "What did you feel . . .?". Themes in the interviews were very much related to the here and now situation of being on the tall ship, exploring details of the experience of being at sea, duties on board, observations, and places on the tall ship. Being informed by the observations of the researcher, situations involving multisensory stimuli were explored, such as the feeling of how to climb onto the platforms during high waves—which included a vertical hanging to enter the second level of rope ladders to enter higher sails—or the feeling of sleeping in hammocks under deck during waves, as well as unique observations of birds and sea animals.

6. Analyses

6.1. Quantitative Data

Data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS statistics program, version 27. An independent-samples *t*-test was run comparing the Windjammer (onboarding, $n = 122$) and Ungdata ($n = 793,879$) groups on selected psychological variables (see Table 1 for details). Another independent samples *t*-test was run comparing the Windjammers at onboarding ($n = 122$) and 3 months post adventure ($n = 39$). Only items that were included in both the Ungdata and the Windjammer (onboarding and 3-month) surveys were selected for analyses and merged into one single SPSS file. The merged dataset included 25 variables and responses from $N = 794,040$ participants.

6.2. Sensory Ethnological Analysis

Informed by the multisensory experiences of the researcher during participation in the Windjammer program, a rich understanding of the sailing adventure from an insider perspective provided the starting point for the ethnological analyses. The insider perspective included a perspective of cooperation among the professional crew, voyage leader, volunteering adults, and the Windjammers themselves. The seven interviews were analyzed inspired by the ethnological method, where sensory awareness of the situation and context was essential to access informants' perception of meaning.

Analyses included reading through written observational notes, listening to interview audio recordings, transcribing interviews, and then reading transcriptions and performing a reflexive process involving going back and forth between reading and interpreting the material. According to Pink (2015), this is a holistic process. The transcription of interviews makes up the body of empirical knowledge, and the data were further analyzed using principles from reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022). This analytical method included an interpretation process of coding, organizing into sub-themes, main themes, and overarching themes, as well as using an abductive approach of understanding a deeper meaning within the material, through a reflexive back-and-forth interpretation together with self-reflexivity.

The transcribed Interviews consisted of 74 pages of written material, further coded into 307 organic codes across the material, with data provided from all seven informants, in addition to observational notes. The material reached a level of maturation during the last interview, with few new codes appearing from this interview. Codes varied from single mentions to mentions by many. Some informants also repeated some of their mentions. Our intention was to identify the richness and the complexity of the typical tall ship experience. Some codes were single words, such as "lonely", "demanding", "acceptance", "responsibility", and "beautiful", while other codes were several words, such as "silence: to turn off the motor", "philosophize about life", or "the more waves, the more fun". During the next step of analysis, the 307 codes were organized into 13 topics. These topics were mixed hedonic feelings, eudaimonic feelings, nature/aesthetics, sailing, challenges, surprise, rope work, social dimension, rig work, lookout duty, safety work, the project, and personal transformation. Examples of codes informing the topic lookout duty were "singing", "not being afraid", "calm and restless at the same time", "like being at the post", "time alone", "dialogue with myself", "vastness/water", "break", "one hour for myself", "fascinating", "waves", and "nice to stay there thinking". Examples from the topic rig work were "joy mixed with horror", "surrealistic", "overcome fear", "being used to new movements", "meaningful in severe weather", "fear of heights", "big experience", "adaption", "love to climb", "skills", "scary to look at", "climb straight up", "climbing is much of the charm being here", "hold tight", "nerve-wracking", and "difference of being in the high altitude for job or pleasure". A third topic, nature/aesthetic, included "dolphins", "cool and exotic to see dolphins", "flying fish", "starry heaven", "aesthetic experience", "beauty", "took photos of the sun", "fascinating waves", "magic horizon", "awe", "history", "authentic", "I like the ocean", "mink whale", "sick bird", "sea bird", "sound—a sick bass", "bioluminescent algae making firework in the sea", and "wonder".

Altogether, the 13 topics indicated and summarized the overall content of the seven interviews. During the further analytic and reflective process, a back-and-forth interpretation of these 13 topics resulted in a distillation into four overarching themes. The reflective process was abductive, also informed by theory and sensory observations from the researcher.

6.3. Mixed Approach Analysis

To ensure anonymity, fictitious names were given to the informants consenting to provide questionnaire and interview data: Fred (25 years), Anna (18 years), and Robert (22 years). When referring to these individual stories, we use personal pronouns (he/him or her/she). One fourth informant completed the questionnaires, gave written consent to, and participated in the interview, but did not consent to provide questionnaire data. Thus, this informant was deleted from the mixed-methods analysis. Three interview informants did not complete the questionnaires; hence, they only provided qualitative data for the analyses. There were some administrative challenges regarding distribution of questionnaires, leading to missing data and somewhat lower response rates than expected. For the three informants meeting the mixed approach inclusion criteria, questionnaire data were interpreted alongside observational and interview data.

7. Results

7.1. Quantitative Data

After recoding all scales so that higher numbers denoted more of the quality in question, an independent-samples *t*-test was run comparing the onboarding Windjammer ($n = 122$) to the Ungdata ($n = 793,879$) sample. Overall, the Windjammer sample differed significantly from the general adolescent Ungdata sample ($p < 0.001$) in that they experienced life as less meaningful ($M = 2.96$ vs. $M = 3.49$; Cohen's $d = 1.38$). They also felt lonelier ($M = 1.95$ vs. $M = 1.82$; Cohen's $d = 1.00$), were often disappointed with themselves ($M = 2.96$ vs. $M = 2.50$; Cohen's $d = 1.34$), did not like the way they lived their life ($M = 3.19$ vs. $M = 2.27$; Cohen's $d = 1.42$), and were less satisfied with their appearance ($M = 3.42$ vs. $M = 3.48$; Cohen's $d = 1.29$) than the average youth population, respectively. The Windjammers were not as good as other adolescents at staying calm when they encountered difficulties ($M = 3.21$ vs. $M = 3.57$; Cohen's $d = 1.23$), were a bit more nervous ($M = 1.93$ vs. $M = 1.72$; Cohen's $d = 0.94$), and did not experience finding methods for getting what they wanted when someone was opposing them ($M = 3.29$ vs. $M = 3.70$; Cohen's $d = 1.10$), but they were less affected by feelings of worthlessness ($M = 1.63$ vs. $M = 1.68$; Cohen's $d = 0.99$) than other adolescents. However, the Windjammers were equally hopeful for the future and just as confident of getting a good and happy life as the general adolescent population (see Table 1 for details).

Table 1. Results from an independent-samples *t*-test, comparing Ungdata and Windjammer data on all relevant variables. n.s. = not significant.

Variable	Ungdata			Windjammer			<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	N	<i>M</i>	SD	N	<i>M</i>	SD		
I feel that what I do in life is meaningful (<i>s</i> *)	268,024	3.49	1.38	119	2.96	1.12	0.000	1.38
Felt lonely (<i>u</i> *)	709,246	1.82	0.97	119	1.95	0.89	0.001	1.00
Felt hopelessness about the future (<i>d</i> *)	709,444	1.88	1.00	120	2.13	0.98	n.s.	1.00
What do you think your future will be? Do you think you . . . will have a good, happy life? (<i>f</i> *)	739,819	1.56	0.88	119	1.66	0.92	n.s.	0.88
How happy or unhappy are you . . . with parents (<i>h</i> *)	736,215	4.39	1.12	120	3.78	0.90	0.05	1.12

Table 1. Cont.

Variable	Ungdata			Windjammer			<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
... with friends (h*)	734,235	4.39	1.02	121	3.90	1.00	n.s.	1.02
... with school (h*)	735,252	3.77	1.21	121	2.98	1.22	n.s.	1.21
... with neighborhood (h*)	733,391	3.84	1.18	121	3.24	1.08	n.s.	1.18
... with health (h*)	733,337	3.81	1.23	121	3.36	1.06	n.s.	1.23
... with appearance (h*)	731,546	3.48	1.29	120	3.42	1.07	0.001	1.29
Been nervous or felt uneasy (a*)	497,014	1.72	0.94	119	1.93	0.86	0.003	0.94
Felt worthless (a*)	306,209	1.68	0.99	120	1.63	0.80	0.001	0.99
I'm very happy with how I am (s*)	519,876	3.92	1.16	118	3.45	1.06	n.s.	1.16
I'm often disappointed with myself (s*)	517,172	2.50	1.34	119	2.96	1.15	0.000	1.34
I don't like the way that I live my life (s*)	226,569	2.37	1.42	120	3.19	1.14	0.000	1.42
I'm generally happy with myself (s*)	227,272	3.87	1.22	120	3.47	1.03	n.s.	1.22
I like myself the way I am (s*)	498,332	3.84	1.24	120	3.55	1.07	n.s.	1.24
I'm very happy with the way I am (s*)	289,427	3.89	1.23	120	3.37	1.08	n.s.	1.23
I find it quite difficult to make friends (s*)	270,316	2.14	1.34	118	2.72	1.29	n.s.	1.34
I always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough (e*)	210,449	4.00	1.01	119	3.82	0.84	n.s.	1.01
If someone is opposing me, I can find methods and ways of getting what I want (e*)	204,830	3.70	1.10	118	3.29	0.85	0.005	1.10
I feel confident that I could deal with unexpected events in an effective manner (e*)	203,168	3.81	1.08	119	3.60	0.85	n.s.	1.08
I stay calm when I encounter difficulties because I have confidence in my ability to master situations (e*)	203,401	3.57	1.23	118	3.21	1.11	0.05	1.23

7.2. Findings from the Sensory Ethnographic Approach

The researcher experienced a broad spectrum of feelings and sensory experiences during the adventure—from the lowest point of seasickness and influenza with fever, to the highest point of spiritual experiences during a shift performing lookout duty. Other experiences included bonding with fellow crewmembers and adolescents, and experiencing thrill and awe when climbing the rig during storms and high waves. The sailing adventure was rich in visual, auditive, tactile, smell, and taste experiences. Being far out on at sea, day and night, in all weather conditions, included getting familiar with the sound of waves, the feeling of heavy rope in hands, the tightening of muscles when pulling the ropes, the smell of the sea breeze, the experience of steering the tall ship under the starry heavens, eating tasty meals from exceptional cooks, and sleeping in hammocks lined up, close to the ceiling, in a crowded area under deck. Through the analytic process, four overarching themes emerged from the seven interviews describing the experience of being on the tall ship: commitment, social wellbeing, familiarization with seamanship, and self-acceptance.

7.2.1. Commitment

Participants who believed that participation would contribute to a change in their life reported having a greater outcome of the adventure. Informants committed to the sailing adventure expressed more acceptance, respect, pro-social behavior, a greater willingness to try new things, and an eagerness to learn. They had an understanding that they “needed” this experience to shift their lifestyle habits and believed that the tall ship sailing adventure was an opportunity to make this change. From observations, the degree of commitment

among the Windjammers varied. Whereas a few Windjammers really wanted to be on the adventure, others did not. As a consequence of not committing and wanting to be part of the crew, they sought ways to escape their duties: not being ready for their twice-a-day four-hour shifts, not contributing to the physical work (pulling ropes, climbing the rig to fix sails), escaping participation by seeking medical leave, or not being able to shift perspective from their own self-absorption to the wellbeing of the group as a whole. Adolescents with threatened self-worth can tend to feel criticized and, hence, respond defensively. For these adolescents, the Windjammer program may not be a good fit, as it may trigger their deep (and lacking) sense of worth.

Peter mentioned his reason to join the adventure: *"I had a really good reason to come. It is to quit bad habits. Really. [...] Addiction and stuff like that"*.

William reflected on the importance of respecting each other: *"[...] if people do not respect each other, it will be bad atmosphere all the time"*.

Anna mentioned how being committed affected her respect for other people doing their shift work: *"You show respect for those who have had the four-hour shift before you, like 'now you can go sleep and we can take over'"*.

Peter also mentioned his willingness to follow the ship rules: *"The only thing you can do is to show up for your shift and do as good as you can. [...] You HAVE TO wake up. And if you don't, it will affect the others. It relates to just getting out of bed. It may be difficult for many, but you must do it. You cannot hide. Then, it will be heavy and crazy"*.

Paul mentioned that he had a reason for joining the adventure: *"I did not come back here to travel back home again"*.

7.2.2. Social Wellbeing

The social wellbeing theme related to being safe and being seen by others, and it included the wish to socialize and make new friends. The social aspect of being put together in shift teams, the physical environment of living, the meals, and the close relationship to other Windjammers were main concerns for all informants. Life on a tall ship is social, as there are people around everywhere, all the time. The only opportunity for alone time is at the steering or performing lookout duty, or when locking others out using headphones. Social wellbeing was often expressed as *"the best experience"* on the tall ship, yet it was easily threatened when people were met with negativity or a lack of willingness to cooperate, which was a special challenge when Windjammers were exhausted or sick. Positive social relations seemed to be a defining characteristic of a growth-producing Windjammer experience. On the contrary, lack of social wellbeing made the adventure more of a misery, with less growth resulting when feeling lonely in relation to the others. Volunteering adults made a considerable effort to make Windjammers feel socially comfortable during leisure time, e.g., by initiating card games and conversations, or doing things such as laundry and watching dolphins or the sunset. In addition, the social wellbeing aspect also related to feeling comfortable and relaxed in this very special situation and being open even to spiritual experiences that may occur during sailing.

William mentioned a situation involving caring for each other when the deck was wet and slippery and they were working with ropes *"[...] we take care of each other, regardless of who we are"*. They appreciated the company of other Windjammers: *"I think it is very fun to be social among others. I like it"*.

Anna mentioned dinners as being the coziest part of the day. *"[...] because then all shift team members are awake at the same time because they have to"*.

Peter mentioned that he enjoyed staying on the ship: *"Everything on the ship is good, and good people"*.

Robert mentioned it is a good and peaceful life at sea and a break from digital addiction: *"It is nice in a way that if you get bored, you go and talk with someone, instead of taking out your mobile phone. It is nice in the way that when you have the clear star heaven and . . . these are among the better things, I think."* He also mentioned the need for cooperation and the fun experience of turning the ship to change course with all contributing to the operation.

7.2.3. Familiarization with Seamanship

Learning by trying and doing, Windjammers were invited to explore their fear of heights, their fear of not being strong enough, and trusting others when standing on a wire cable high up in the rig. Each new task required courage and for them to commit and to try. The crew were always supportive and encouraged Windjammers to try and to gain the competence needed to succeed. The Windjammers who became rig climbers during the adventure got more positive feedback from the crew than those who did not climb, and they also felt a heightened sense of status on the ship, both from the crew and from their fellow Windjammers.

The extent to which the informants were familiarized with the ship, the work, and the height was related to their expression of eudaimonic feelings and their overall experience of the adventure. Several skills needed to be developed over time by the Windjammers, and the professional tall ship crew set the schedule for them to cover the posts of steering, lookout duty, and safety inspection. Instructions from the coxswain on sail and rope maneuvers had to be followed, and these instructions depended on navigation, winds, and the captains' decisions. Rope maneuverers needed a precise understanding of what was going on, with communication being essential to ensure that the right ropes were pulled at the right time with the right force for the right operation to be initiated. Hence, cooperation within the rope team was essential as learning the rope system of the fully rigged tall ship, with about 9 kilometers of rope, was a complex task. By the end of the adventure, Windjammers better understood this complexity.

To sail, climbing the rig is essential, as different sails are operated from different height positions in the rig. Two of the interview informants refused to climb the rig, while the other five informants had their strongest emotional experiences when working and climbing here. Some Windjammers had medical reasons not to climb, others seemed to lack the physical skills and strength allowing them to trust themselves, and yet others were afraid of heights and unwilling to challenge this feeling. From observation, some Windjammers needed several weeks to gain this trust, after which they started climbing and doing rig work. Others never reached this level of confidence. Yet, the moments of overcoming fear, of pushing themselves, and experiencing mastery were very powerful and triggered personal growth. The Windjammers who participated in their second voyage seemed to have crossed the climbing barrier during their first voyage and were more determined to do rig work from the start.

Paul mentioned that the steering post was easy. *"It is like having a break if you are at the lookout duty or steering post, or . . . You kind of get one hour for yourself, that you often don't get. [. . .] I appreciate that"*. During the interview, all sails on the tall ship were set, which was a rare experience. Imagining taking them down all at once, Paul said: *"wow wow wow, that would be fun"*.

Paul also reflected on the difference in focus from his first to his second voyage: *"[. . .] on the first voyage, I was most focused on the social aspect of being here, but on this second voyage, I have been most focused on the professional aspects, you can say"*.

Robert mentioned how he overcame his fear during his first voyage, and that the second voyage was much easier: *"Before the first voyage, I was afraid of heights. I struggled a lot to come up to the first sail, I mean the main sail or . . . the first time. But at the end of the voyage, the fear was over, so I am pretty happy that I got a second chance to join the tall ship again and get the opportunity to set sail. [. . .] Now I am very often in the rig to set the sails. [. . .] I think it is fun. [. . .] Much of the charm of sailing this [. . .] ship is to set sails [. . .] it is how to move forward without engine"*.

Eric had built much confidence in the rig and characterizes the climbing as "cozy". He expressed it as *"the higher climbing, the more fun"*. For Eric, the tall ship was a place of freedom, and he was a resource for rig work, such as in bad weather or with few available climbers. He expressed a wish that the voyage would last longer: *"If it was up to me, it should have been half a year at sea"*.

7.2.4. Self-Acceptance

Informants mentioned a positive development in how they viewed their lives resulting from the sailing adventure. As there was no place to go to avoid or to hide when things were difficult, they were forced to meet themselves. They found time to let their thoughts fly and reported a deeper acceptance of their life. From this acceptance, a creative and transformative process involving a perception of their own capabilities and possibilities developed. How close this change was in relation to actual changes in life was not captured within the observations and interviews. However, the process of being part of the sailing adventure made a difference, particularly for those who were committed to the adventure from the start. They were more engaged in their social wellbeing by interacting with other Windjammers, contributed more to the rig crew by taking responsibility for fluency in the rig work, and were actively engaged in their shift duties. This ability to accept themselves also enabled them to admit that some tasks were difficult, and that they did not feel mastery.

Fred mentioned that he had an important personal insight. When he reflected over his life, he recognized a lack of self-acceptance, which was remedied by the adventure: *"In a way, I have never allowed myself to be so young. To be myself in a way. To do what I say and feel for. [...] I have never trusted that I can say and do things ... I mean, in a way that people tolerate it. [...] It feels very useful for me to be a kind of role model for younger people, who maybe need it"*.

Anna mentioned that she had become more self-confident from the adventure:

Researcher: *"Do you think it is the same Anna that returns home?"*

Anna: *"No, I think it is a different Anna. One that is less 'I am sorry' and more ... 'yes ... that was stupid' ... instead of 'sorry'"*.

Peter was very enthusiastic about the sailing adventure. He had fun when climbing in the rig and strongly believed the adventure had changed his life: *"I have got a stronger light at the end of the tunnel"*. He expressed gratitude and pride, and that the adventure was good life training: *"training in staying in good health"*. Yet, he mentioned an experience of failure during a shift at the steering post, and disliked it after the experience: *"... and I was wrong about that rudder, so we turned three times to shift five degrees, and then we moved far over. Then, I had to turn back to get it up again. It made me so irritated. I didn't understand that half a turn of the rudder was enough. [...] When you fail and stuff like that, it is not fun"*.

William expressed a relaxed feeling when performing lookout duty, starting to think about life: *"For example, when I am performing lookout duty, I think very much about who I will be in the future and all that. Then, I started to philosophize a little"*. He also mentioned the sailing experience as a cool experience which would be remembered for life.

Robert started thinking about a future life at sea: *"On the first voyage, I did not think of working on a boat or something like that. It is something that developed during this second voyage, since I also got some boast from the ship crew too ..."*.

Paul mentioned that the voyage helped him to understand his strengths and opportunities: *"[...] it has helped me to realize how much I will do (refers to life at sea) than it already did. [...] I have learned something about myself, in addition, I have gotten practical experience in seamanship and sailing ..."*.

Eric described a transformational process, a "180-degree turn". He expressed a change in daring to speak with other people: *"Before the first voyage, I had been sitting in my room for months. And [...] not been able to talk with people. I didn't want to meet them. But after two weeks (of sailing), I managed to use my voice and talk with people, being comfortable talking with new people, and just accepting the routines and things like that. It was something that clicked (snapping with fingers). [...] I have been very unconfident with myself and talked with extremely low voice. I wouldn't kind of take that place. But this is different now"*.

8. The Stories of Fred, Anna, and Robert

To further explore three selected individual experiences of the tall ship adventure, we analyzed and integrated pre-adventure and 3-month post-adventure quantitative data with the interview data (see Table 2 for complete pre (n = 122) and 3-month (n = 39) data for the whole Windjammer sample). Overall, there was not much detectable change among the

overall Windjammer group three months after an adventure. However, we saw a slight decrease in meaning in life ($M = 2.96$ vs. $M = 2.86$; Cohen's $d = 1.18$) and in how happy they were with school ($M = 2.98$ vs. $M = 2.94$; Cohen's $d = 1.18$) from before to after the voyage, respectively. It must be noted that the standard deviations, regarding meaning in life, increased from the pre to 3-month measurement, indicating larger personal variation.

Table 2. Results from an independent-samples t -test, comparing two independent samples of Windjammer participants on all relevant variables. n.s. = not significant.

Variable	Windjammer Pre			Windjammer 3 Months			p	Cohen's d
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
I feel that what I do in life is meaningful (s*)	119	2.96	1.12	37	2.86	1.38	0.05	1.18
Felt lonely (u*)	119	1.95	0.89	39	2.08	0.90	n.s.	0.89
Felt hopelessness about the future (d*)	120	2.13	0.98	39	2.03	1.11	n.s.	1.02
What do you think your future will be? Do you think you ... will have a good, happy life? (f*)	119	1.66	0.92	38	1.63	0.88	n.s.	0.91
How happy or unhappy are you ... with parents (h*)	120	3.78	0.90	39	3.44	1.00	n.s.	0.92
... with friends (h*)	121	3.90	1.00	38	3.74	1.01	n.s.	1.00
... with school (h*)	121	2.98	1.22	34	2.94	1.04	0.05	1.18
... with neighborhood (h*)	121	3.24	1.08	39	3.05	1.00	n.s.	1.06
... with health (h*)	121	3.36	1.06	39	2.95	1.10	n.s.	1.07
... with appearance (h*)	120	3.42	1.07	39	3.18	1.17	n.s.	1.10
Been nervous or felt uneasy (a*)	119	1.93	0.86	39	2.26	1.02	n.s.	0.90
Felt worthless (a*)	120	1.63	0.80	39	1.79	0.95	n.s.	0.84
I'm very happy with how I am (s*)	118	3.45	1.06	39	3.41	1.09	n.s.	1.07
I'm often disappointed with myself (s*)	119	2.96	1.15	39	3.15	1.14	n.s.	1.14
I don't like the way that I live my life (s*)	120	3.19	1.14	39	3.31	1.24	n.s.	1.16
I'm generally happy with myself (s*)	120	3.47	1.03	39	3.38	1.07	n.s.	1.04
I like myself the way I am (s*)	120	3.55	1.07	39	3.54	1.19	n.s.	1.10
I'm very happy with the way I am (s*)	120	3.37	1.08	39	2.90	1.17	n.s.	1.10
I find it quite difficult to make friends (s*)	118	2.72	1.29	38	2.71	1.29	n.s.	1.29
I always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough (e*)	119	3.82	0.84	38	3.92	0.71	n.s.	0.81
If someone is opposing me, I can find methods and ways of getting what I want (e*)	118	3.29	0.85	38	3.16	0.92	n.s.	0.87
I feel confident that I could deal with unexpected events in an effective manner (e*)	119	3.60	0.85	38	3.39	0.97	n.s.	0.88
I stay calm when I encounter difficulties because I have confidence in my ability to master situations (e*)	118	3.21	1.11	38	3.18	0.96	n.s.	1.07

When investigating the three individual stories, a more nuanced picture was painted. In terms of meaning in life, Fred reported a slight increase in experienced meaning in life from onboarding ("not at all true") to 3 months post adventure ("neither or"). Anna also experienced an increase in meaning in life, from "not very true" to "quite true", while Robert did not experience any change ("not at all true" at both data collection points). Six

individual satisfaction items (satisfaction with (1) parents, (2) friends, (3) school, (4) local community, (5) health, and (6) appearance; scored on a 1–5 Likert scale from “very unhappy” to “very happy”) were included in the pre-adventure and 3-month post-adventure data collections. These were computed into two overall satisfaction variables (pre- and post-measures). Results showed that Fred and Anna experienced increased satisfaction from onboarding to 3 months after the adventure (an increase from 2.33 to 3.50, and from 3.33 to 4.00 for Fred and Anna, respectively). Robert reported a decrease in this same period, from 3.0 to 2.67. Exploring other variables, all three informants reported a reduction in “felt lonely” (from $M = 3.33$ to $M = 2.33$), “felt unhappy, sad or depressed” (from $M = 2.67$ to $M = 1.67$), “worried too much about things” (from $M = 2.00$ to $M = 1.33$), and “been angry and aggressive” (from $M = 2.33$ to $M = 1.33$) during the past week at the 3-month post voyage data collection, to mention a few tendencies. All three expressed that participating in the Windjammer program made them more motivated to complete their education and get a job.

8.1. Fred

Fred wanted to start studying at the university; however, even though he had planned to, he had not yet completed high school. Fred lived alone. On the item “I feel as valued as other people”, Fred answered “I strongly disagree”, which indicates a low perception of self-worth. Fred struggled to get friends and had been striving to feel authentic when attempting to fit in with others. This is reflected in the question “I find it quite difficult to make friends” to which he replied “quite true” at onboarding but “not quite true” 3 months later. On the ship, Fred experimented with taking on new social roles. During the interview, he reflected on being a role model for other adolescents with similar social challenges. Fred was an active rig climber and enjoyed the feeling of being up high. He also climbed during leisure time just to experience observing the sea below. A few times during the adventure, Fred led by example and encouraged others to be authentic and open by sharing his feelings. He put a lot of effort into this. These were growing experiences for him, as well for others, which could be behind his slight improvement from onboarding to follow-up on three items related to self-esteem (feeling valued, satisfied with himself, and feeling successful). Fred had the ability to get other people emotionally moved. Fred learned a lot about self-acceptance during the adventure and put his learning into practice, which may have contributed to his creation of meaning.

8.2. Anna

Anna was planning to start a new education, which she did upon return from the adventure. Anna reported an increase in perceived meaning in life from onboarding to 3 months after the adventure (from “not very true” to “quite true”), indicating a perception of high self-worth (s^* in Table 1). In the beginning of the adventure, she had several verbal fights and aggressive behavior displays; however, by the end, she felt more relaxed, like she was on a “vacation”, using her own words. Anna enjoyed the social company on the ship, especially during dinner time, when everybody gathered to eat. Yet, her attitude toward people changed from onboarding to follow-up, reporting being disappointed in people and being treated unfairly “very often” at follow-up. She also experienced opposing emotions and feeling like a loser more often at follow-up than she did at onboarding. Anna was not a climber, and, although she reported no or low levels of anxiety at both timepoints, she refused to try. Other duties were OK, and she did a good job cleaning the toilets. She was enthusiastic about teaching others to clean properly. Anna was committed to the work on the ship, but sometimes tired. She slept in a hammock, not asking for a vacant bed. Anna said she learned the value of staying committed to the tasks and living on the vessel. Experiencing her own endurance and the ability to work hard gave her hope for future success in life, relevant for her creation of meaning.

8.3. Robert

Robert responded “disagree” at both timepoints to the item “I feel as valued as other people”, denoting a low perception of self-worth. Robert had a good understanding of the tasks on the vessel and was a rig climber. He also volunteered for rig climbing during his leisure time. Robert said he was afraid of heights during his first adventure, but this was not a problem on his second voyage. He enjoyed being far out at sea and described the feeling as “pleasant”: the higher the waves, the stronger his feelings. He felt more self-confident following the sailing adventure and expressed an increased willingness to take risks than before the voyage. This was mentioned as a growing experience. At follow-up, Robert reported that the Windjammer program had given him increased motivation to get a job (from “somewhat” to “very much so” at onboarding and follow-up, respectively). Even though Robert did not experience increased meaning in life from the adventure (responding “not at all true” to the meaning in life item at both timepoints) and reported only a slight increase in how happy he was with himself from onboarding to three months after, he dreamt of a future as a professional sailor. During his interview he said that tall ships were his top priority, and he was motivated by the positive feedback he got from the crew. Seamanship emerged as a possible life profession, something he did not consider before participating in the adventure. This gave him a new sense of hope expressed as reduced hopelessness about the future (from experienced “daily” to “never” at onboarding and follow-up, respectively), even though he kept experiencing everything as a struggle (from “sometimes” to “often”), and his sleep problems increased from “sometimes” to “daily” between onboarding and three months after return.

9. Discussion

Overall, this study shows that participating in a tall ship adventure had personal rewards affecting the creation of meaning in life and adolescents’ perception of themselves. These rewards were related to four overarching themes, informed from the seven informants and the sensory observation: experiences of commitment to the adventure, self-acceptance, gaining knowledge and experience of sailing and seamanship, and the social relationships that developed during the time at sea. These overarching themes give an indication of a typical process of participating in the tall ship adventure.

As seen, experiencing and finding meaning in life is important for wellbeing, particularly during the vulnerable time of adolescence (Krok 2018; Lin and Shek 2019). The ability to create meaning in situations that represent turning points in life is shown to be associated with increased wellbeing (Tavernier and Willoughby 2012). As seen in this study, participating in the Windjammer tall ship adventure truly represented a turning point for at-risk adolescents, offering an opportunity for finding and creating meaning, for developing greater self-acceptance, for strengthening social bonds, and for learning new practical skills related to seamanship. For these experiences to happen, being committed to the adventure, i.e., being open to the idea that this adventure was worth trying, seemed to be essential.

In the current study, meaning in life was created and experienced as part of the tall ship adventure, supporting the perspective of meaning in life in the controversy between the question of (creating) meaning in life versus (finding) the meaning of life. The ability to create meaning was, as such, important for making use of the unique Windjammer experience. Although we found that participating Windjammers reported a lower experience of meaning in life than the general Norwegian adolescent population at onboarding (see Table 1 for details), our interview data suggest that the adventure affected the experience of meaning in several ways: through new opportunities for commitment and self-acceptance, through opportunities for learning practical seamanship, and through experiencing supportive social relations. Meaning was found to involve realizing one’s potential, thus denoting the concept of eudaimonic wellbeing. The post-measure three months later showed a complex picture of wellbeing variables on a group level. It is not surprising that returning to the home condition could be challenging and a newly learned

skill or social role onboard the tall ship could be hard to sustain in the home context. This could partly explain the slightly lower score on meaning in life and happiness with school found in the post-voyage data (see Table 2). However, the number of responses was low, and more data should be collected before drawing conclusions about effect. Comparison between independent samples in the pre- and post-conditions must be interpreted with caution, but the results indicated that an elevation of these measures was not typically made after one month at sea. For the happiness with school measure, it must be mentioned that many of the participants did not return to school after the adventure. Some did, while others returned to work or started working. Yet, others may have received other kinds of support to enable a return to society. Three months after the adventure, other aspects seemed to be more important to their reported low levels of meaning. The experiences of the adventure and new perspectives on possibilities in life that the adventure opened may have actually contributed to a reduced experience of meaning following the adventure as the adolescents returned to their daily life. For some, this consisted of playing video games and social isolation. Changes in meaning in life could require actual changes in life to take place, which do take time and would also be dependent of support in the home environment or the governmental services. However, this does not mean that the sailing adventure did not influence the meaning making process on an individual life story level. As such, the quantitative group data did override the three individual stories, as they shed light on the personal processes occurring while on a tall ship. Combined with the pre- and post-variables, they painted a complex picture of how meaning in life is a process that can take many forms through the adventure. Participating in a tall ship adventure is not a single, uniform process, but can take many forms and give different points of learning and insight, given both the individual stories and the unique context of the tall ship. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data was especially beneficial in understanding the output of the adventure on a personal level. The quantitative results alone might have overlooked the differences of meaning in life as an abstract overall judgement (questionnaire) versus meaning in life resulting from the specific context of being a part of the crew of other Windjammers. While the experience of meaning from the tall ship could have influenced the general perception of meaning in life, more longitudinal research is needed to identify these generic processes. [Marshall et al. \(2020\)](#) pointed at sailing adventures as especially important for long time virtue development.

As all participating Windjammers were adolescents at risk for social and societal exclusion, providing contexts where meaning in life can be created may be particularly important for assuring adolescents' return to society as fully participating adults. This may also be important for enhancing their overall wellbeing. The tall ship, thus, offered a context where creation of meaning can develop and grow. Participating Windjammers, characterized by lower scores on physical and mental wellbeing, needed to use their energy wisely. Some Windjammers seemed to be more adaptive and recharged more easily than others, showing more resilience when meeting demands. The facilitation role and encouragement reminding participants to preserve energy and recharging cannot be underestimated.

Participants' willingness to change and to take an inner perspective were related to their experience of meaning and purpose during the sailing adventure. These processes were inherent and part of the adventure, and emerged as the four main themes of commitment, social wellbeing, familiarization to seamanship, and self-acceptance in the thematic analyses. Some of these themes also resemble the four needs for meaning proposed by [Baumeister \(1991\)](#), the need for a sense of purpose, for efficacy or the sense of making a difference, for their actions to have a positive value, and a positive self-worth. On the ship, the adolescents had time and space to explore the self, which might be difficult to accomplish or prioritize in daily life. This opportunity to escape everyday living environments is a general quality of adventure and outdoor programs ([Zeivots 2018](#)). In addition, Windjammers experienced mastery and gained new knowledge of their own abilities and personal qualities during the sailing adventure, as seen in the participant's stories. The

personal changes that Windjammers described can be related to the theory of life stories (McAdams 2001), where identity is constructed and evolves as narratives over time. Accordingly, the Windjammer program provided an opportunity for adolescents to grow and change, with new self-narratives being developed. However, for these new narratives to be established to the degree that behavioral or situational change follows, time is required. In the current study, the slight decrease in meaning seen in the quantitative data following the adventure could be explained in terms of Windjammers seeing new opportunities and obtaining a new perspective on themselves during sailing without having been able to create the needed changes within the 3 first months upon return. For them to change at-risk behavior, help from the governmental agencies may be required. This takes time—as does being accepted into a work-enhancing or educational program.

Friends and social relationships are extremely important for adolescents; yet, for those dropping out of school, social competency and skills may suffer. Living and working on a tall ship is an extremely social situation, providing Windjammers with sufficient social practice to enhance their social skills, which was mentioned by several participants as important experiences during the adventure. According to Keyes (1998), social wellbeing is important for wellbeing, which may explain why the Windjammers valued the adventure and the importance they placed on social relationships during the sailing adventure.

When relating the current finding to prior conceptualizations of psychological wellbeing theory (PWB; Ryff and Singer 2008), the four emerging themes can be interpreted as relevant to positive relationships (social wellbeing), environmental mastery (seamanship), autonomy (commitment), and self-acceptance (an existing PWB category). Another theory that supports the overarching themes found in the current study is the positive youth development theory (PYD; Lerner et al. 2021). The four overarching themes can be related to the 5 Cs in the following way: familiarization to seamanship can be related to competence and confidence, being committed to the sailing program relates to the development of character, and social wellbeing includes important aspects of connection and caring (Lerner et al. 2021). Another theory states that tall ship experiences facilitate virtue development (Marshall et al. 2020), which can be supported by the character-building process of developing agency through the tall ship training. Consequently, self-acceptance appears to have the potential to instigate a transformational change in life (Garcia et al. 2014).

The individual stories of Fred, Anna, and Robert shed light on how youth can have different starting points, as well as how their unique personal growth trajectories and experiences of meaning can be supported by different aspects of the adventure. Even though the program had some very specific frames, there were huge variations in what was perceived as most important. For Anna, the social and commitment aspects were most important. For Fred, the process of daring to be honest with himself and invite others to share feelings was a huge victory. For Robert, the familiarity and enjoyment of doing rig work inspired him to open up to new possible careers, and to the idea of becoming a seaman.

An important question remaining regards what is special about sailing a tall ship. While other adventures in nature, such as living in the forest or mountains, could be beneficial in creating meaning, the multisensory experience of being at sea and the physical distance experienced when being out in open waters where everybody is literally in the same boat invite spiritual aspects into the more existential questions of being human. Being at sea, especially during lookout duty, provides a time for reflection and for moving the attention inward. When searching for explanations for why nature is beneficial for human wellbeing, the spiritual aspects of long-distance sailing, particularly related to eudaimonic feelings of meaning, presence, and wonder, could be classified as a non-religious pilgrimage (Jirásek and Hurych 2019). In other contexts, particularly in activity-based programs, this aspect would be less clear, as the facilitation of self-acceptance resulting from the experience of being rather than doing during the sailing adventure is a core aspect of finding meaning in life.

The current study contributes by adding a wider perspective on how experiences from a tall ship adventure promote wellbeing within a social entrepreneurship program, emphasizing how meaning and purpose in life influences adolescents' lives, before and during the adventure. The finding that creating meaning takes time and is a process resonates with knowledge from nature-based therapy, showing a correlation between time spent in nature and stronger predicted outcomes on personal control and sense of coherence (Grahm and Palsdottir 2021). The current study found that, for committed adolescents, the length of the voyage (4 weeks) may not necessarily be enough for creating the needed change required to return to work or school. However, the adventure seemed to positively influence personal control, contributing to a greater sense of coherence, and a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life. For Windjammers participating in their second voyage, these associations seemed to be stronger.

10. Implications

The current findings provide new insights into the creation of meaning in life among youth at risk. Adolescents who are committed to the adventure and who invest effort into making the best out of it have a huge potential for growing experiences. As seen, this factor seems to be a precondition for a successful youth adventure and experience, and awareness of personal motivation to embark on an adventure such as this should be addressed in future projects. Furthermore, this study contributes both to environmental research and to public health promotion by providing evidence from an existing intervention program in the blue element, using a traditional tall ship. Environmental concerns are growing, and sailing without the use of engines is an excellent alternative for the future to enhance wellbeing among at-risk youth by creating meaning and purpose using traditional ships and sailing competence. To build happy and meaningful lives, both hedonic (satisfaction) and eudaimonic (personal growth) elements are needed. In the future, themes such as spirituality, (self)compassion, and a holistic approach to wellbeing and life should be adopted and explored when attempting to further promote wellbeing and mental health among youth.

11. Limitations

The study had several limitations. First, the number of Windjammers participating in the study could have been higher. This yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Overall, data were collected from voyages 7–12, with a total of 122 Windjammers providing onboarding data and 39 Windjammers providing 3-month post-voyage data. In addition, seven participants from one of the adventures were interviewed. One limitation is that not all participants providing onboarding data provided post-voyage data, while not all participants providing post-voyage data provided onboarding data. This resulted in two independent samples of participants rather than enabling longitudinal analyses from the same participants across time. Hence, there may have been group differences that were not detected in the current material. Secondly, more variables should preferably have been included as some relevant variables may be currently lacking. Thirdly, the question of meaning in life might be hard to measure directly, as the creation of meaning could be more or less conscious as a concept among participating adolescents. There could have been other aspects of creating meaning that we overlooked. Fourth, including longitudinal data could have increased our understanding of the long-term influence of the adventure. Furthermore, only one adventure was studied in depth using the ethnographical approach, and including more observations, interviews, and sensory approaches could have contributed to deeper insights. Lastly, including other materials such as pictures and videos could have provided more detailed data for analyses.

12. Conclusions

Windjammer participants showed lower meaning in life and were less satisfied with how they lived their life than the general adolescent population. Interview data from seven

Windjammers suggested that the tall ship adventure is an opportunity to get away from daily life and social media, providing a space for self-reflection. These were among some aspects of creating meaning in life, which was not captured by pre- and post-measures. Windjammers' experiences were typically related to the four overarching themes of commitment, social wellbeing, familiarization with seamanship, and self-acceptance, which are all complex aspects of creating meaning in life. Both time alone, such as steering the ship and doing lookout duties, and physically challenging tasks, such as climbing the rig, were growing experiences. These qualities would be of special importance in tall ship adventures. Data suggested that climbing the rig could be of particular significance for the Windjammers, as this was an opportunity for overcoming physical barriers, as well as contributing to performing essential tasks necessary for operating the ship. Through climbing the rig, vulnerable youth reported being seen as valuable members of the crew, obtaining praise, and experiencing coping in the face of the unknown. Moreover, being committed to the project of operating the tall ship, not only being a passenger, was connected to many benefits of being open to explore new social roles, which again generated social wellbeing and willingness to learn about seamanship. This complex way of living, including time alone, invited the processes of self-acceptance. There is no room to escape while sailing, and the need for collaboration is essential. The individual participant stories, connected to their pre- and post-questionnaire data, were testament to the personal transformation that was possible through the tall ship sailing adventure in promoting meaning in life and creating a newfound motivation for committing to life.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants upon enrollment to the research study, as well as from all interview participants before completing any interviews.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical reasons.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

- ¹ For more details on Ungdata, measures, and scales, see <https://www.ungdata.no/metode-og-dokumentasjon/> (accessed on 1 March 2023).

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