

TITLE PAGE

‘Place responsiveness: IPA walking interviews to explore participants’ responses to natural disasters’

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ABSTRACT

Over the last few years, walking interviews have gained the attention of a variety of disciplines and are considered an effective way to conduct interviews under particular circumstances. In this study, we are providing specific examples of the benefits of using walking interviews in the aftermath of an earthquake. Central Italy has recently experienced two significant earthquakes, L’Aquila in 2009 and Amatrice in 2016. In total over 600 people were killed. The earthquakes significantly affected both communities due to the loss of houses, workplaces and recreational facilities.

We describe past research into the walking interview, develop a protocol to explore community issues, and critically evaluate the effectiveness of the technique. The analysis of the walking interviews was conducted with the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Walking interviews have never previously been used in this situation, but examples drawn from the study illustrated how effective they can be. In some situations, perhaps more beneficial than the traditional sitting interview.

KEYWORDS

Earthquake, community, walking interview, protocol, **IPA**.

BIOGRAPHY

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Introduction

The walking interview is a relatively new interviewing technique which draws on not only traditional interviewing but also the benefits of walking for helping a person to think more clearly (Lynch & Mannion, 2016) and to enable interviews to take place in a setting relevant to the purpose of the interview, which also has benefits for triggering appropriate memories, thoughts and emotions about the topic of the interview. Walking interviews have been successfully used in a number of situations. Carpiano and colleagues (2009) introduced the 'Go-along' interview methodology to study the implications of place and space for people's health and well-being. The 'Go-along' interview is an in-depth qualitative method which is conducted by the interviewer accompanying participants around their familiar environments. The 'Go-along' interview can be conducted while walking, driving or both. The researcher will walk through participants' lived experiences of their neighbourhood in order to examine how physical, social and mental dimensions of place and space can impact on people's health and well-being. What Carpiano and colleagues found was that the 'Go-along' interview not only provided an opportunity to increase participants' engagement, but also enhanced the researcher interest and respect towards participants and their neighbourhood. Moreover, walking around also helped participants to better understand their neighbourhood's sources of problems.

Lynch and Mannion (2016) in their research on outdoor learning and education argued that there is a clear need for more place-responsive methodologies. They found out that walking helped the teachers think more clearly. Walking also helped both the interviewer and interviewee to pay attention about those elements found in nature that would have been forgotten if the interview was to be conducted sitting down. Walking with the teachers has also helped them to understand the many possibilities that different places have to enhance several learning practices and to improve knowledge.

There is scope for using this technique across a range of other settings. Here we provide a specific example of the benefits of using the technique in the aftermath of earthquakes.

Walking interviews have never been used by psychologists to explore the impact of earthquakes. This article describes developing, implementing and evaluating an appropriate walking interview protocol for use in a situation where the environment itself is critical to the purpose of the interview. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, et al., 2009) was chosen as analysis methodology as it focuses on understanding the phenomenon via developing the double hermeneutic of the participant attempting to make sense of the world and the interviewer trying to make sense of how the participant makes sense of the world. This approach is particularly useful when the interviewer is being taken – literally – into the world of the phenomenon in question, in this case the cities that were destroyed by an earthquake.

In recent years, Central Italy has experienced several earthquakes of significant magnitude. In 2009 an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 on the Richter scale killed 309 people and almost completely destroyed the town of L'Aquila; In 2016 an earthquake of magnitude 6.0 completely destroyed

Amatrice, Accumoli and Arquata del Tronto killing 298 people. Most psychological research on these earthquakes has focused on the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (American Psychiatry Association, 2013) among survivors (Dell'Osso, et al., 2011a; Dell'Osso, et al., 2011b; Cofini, et al., 2015), though recent studies have shown that factors such as sense of community (Huang & Wong, 2014), economic capability (Xu & He, 2012) and social support (Oyama, et al., 2012) play a fundamental part in minimising the mental health issues arising after a natural disaster (Hogg, et al., 2016). The current research focused on the psychological role of the community when the physical aspects of that community (homes, workplaces, places for leisure, etc) have been destroyed and survivors are largely living in temporary accommodation at a distance from their original homes.

Possible advantages of the walking interview

There may be significant advantages to the use of walking interviews when exploring the personal and community effects of earthquakes. The traditional interview, sitting in an office or living room asking questions and providing answers, while a very useful technique, may have disadvantages when it comes to topics that relate to specific geographical sites. Interviewing people about the impact of an earthquake on themselves, their friends and family, their social support mechanisms and their community may be more effective and have more realism if the interview takes place while exploring the key sites of the earthquake, and the specific sites critical to the interviewee and the community. These may include the interviewee's home, their workplace, their favourite café, friends' houses, the cinema or theatre, and so on. Mobility and mobile methods have gradually become very significant among social sciences researchers in recent years (Evans & Jones, 2011). Mobile methods can provide detailed information about the ways people and places interact (Moles, 2008). The use of walking interviews allows us to get to know those places that are important not only for participants but also for their entire community. By walking, people are able to connect times and places through the grounded experience of their surrounding environment (Moles, 2008).

The importance of place for human beings has been described by Low and Altman (1992) who introduced the concept 'place-attachment'. Place-attachment is a complex phenomenon that involves people-place bonding where people's affects, emotions and feelings are particularly important. Place-attachment contributes to individual, group and cultural self-definition and integrity. Human beings build their homes and communities over time and they become for them a source of familiarity, stability and security. Cuba and Hummon (1993) described places as confined locales permeated with personal, social and cultural meaning in which people's identity is constructed, maintained and transformed. Places are a fundamental part of people's social world and everyday life; they contribute to the development of people's self and then preserve it (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983).

Walking in the street stimulates a multi-sensory experience of the surrounding environment for both the researcher and the participant (Adams & Guy, 2007). Walking helps to reduce possible power

dynamics that might exist between the interviewer and the interviewee being based in a less formal environment (Carpiano, 2009) and can improve the relationship between them because the place itself functions as a co-producer of dialogue (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). Hitchins and Jones (2004) showed that interviewees found it easier to talk about feelings and experiences when near the places symbolic of the tragic event and they could subsequently provide richer data.

There are also advantages for the interviewer as well as the interviewee. In techniques such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, et al., 2009) it is recognised that there is a double hermeneutic. When an interviewer asks questions, the interviewee is attempting to make sense of their experiences. At the same time the interviewer is trying to make sense of what the interviewee is trying to make sense of. When the material is analysed, it is this interpretation that is being presented, so if the interviewer has a more direct experience of the topic of the interview (in this case the earthquake site) then they may develop a more nuanced and sensitive understanding of what the interviewee has said, and in so doing may produce a better analysis.

Developing the protocol

The protocol for the walking interviews is partly the same as a traditional interview but has additional components.

1. Develop the general interview schedule for the topic (eg impact of the earthquake on self and family/friends; longer term effects, coping/support). Ensure the participant is aware of the general nature of the interview
2. Meet with the participant to a) discuss the route to include significant sites such as home, workplace, favourite café or restaurant, etc, b) any additional questions that might result from the choice of sites. This makes the interview place-responsive. The participant is likely to know which route to take to ensure all the sites are seen, and whether these can be done in a single walk or whether another form of transport may be necessary for some sections.
3. Consider the length of the route, the terrain to be covered, safety aspects, the health, fitness and age of the participant and the interviewer; the likelihood of noise on the route which has an impact on the quality of recordings (this may mean that the interview stops and starts because of eg traffic)
4. Select suitable recording equipment, preferably something that reduces the impact of surrounding noise. It is difficult to record using a single microphone when walking side by side, and continually moving the microphone may distract participants. Where possible, use two Bluetooth-linked microphones attached to each participant. If this is not possible, the practical usage and limitations of the microphone need to be explained to the interviewee at the outset so they understand that they must speak into the microphone.

A key implication of the above is that every interview is likely to be different. This is why it is normally essential to have the general interview schedule determined before discussing potential sites and

routes with participants. In this way the researcher ensures the key research questions are covered in each interview.

Conducting the walking interview

We are illustrating the use of walking interview through two individuals drawn from a larger study of the community impact of the two Italian earthquakes mentioned above.

The aims of the study focused on the community impact of the earthquakes on individuals, so the questions focused on: personal impact of earthquake (e.g. symptoms of anxiety or depression), social support, how the community was affected, impact of community changes. Questions were developed depending on the route chosen, but focused on the interviewees' homes, workplaces and other places that were important to them but were destroyed by the earthquakes. The idea of the walking interview was discussed with interviewees and significant places were identified. Discussions were made around the need for the participants or the interviewer to drive or take public transports in order to reach each place. There were problems getting a Bluetooth microphone, so a traditional recorder was used with the microphone being passed between the participants as necessary. Participants were made aware of the limitations of the technology. A colleague of the interviewer was informed of the routes and timings and the interviewer telephoned them after each interview.

Participants

The Faculty of Medicine & Health Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nottingham approved all recruitment and assessment procedures in January 2018. Access to participants was provided by two charities based in L'Aquila and Amatrice, respectively "Associazione 180 Amici" and "La Via del Sale". Two example interviews are included here, one in L'Aquila and one in Amatrice. Participants included G. (Male aged 28) in Amatrice and P. (Female aged 53) in L'Aquila. Before each interview, eligible participants signed a written consent form where they confirmed to have understood the topic of the research and were willing to participate to the study. The interviews were all audio-recorded.

The interviewer is the first author.

Analytic strategy

IPA (Smith, et al., 2009) is a qualitative methodology with roots in phenomenological philosophy and psychology (Langdridge, 2007) with authors such as Husserl (Husserl, 1970), Heidegger (Heidegger, 1962) and Sartre (1943).

The choice of IPA was made because it looks at interviewees' detailed personal lived experiences and their meaning (Smith, et al., 2009), and the interviewer is not simply a mean of data collection, but their knowledge, emotions and experiences become fundamental to understanding the topic (Fink, 2000). The concept of the interviewer being actively engaged in the data collection and analysis

process is crucial for our chosen interview methodology. Walking around the ruins of the old towns prompt both the participant and researcher to be emotionally, physically and psychologically engaged in the interview. IPA methodology is focused on Husserl's research regarding the ways the world appears to people (Langdrige, 2008). For phenomenologists, it is not just a matter of a mind residing into a body; the focus is on the way individuals' consciousness strictly relates to their own perception of the world, in which case the changing perceptions experienced through walking during an interview will impact on the phenomenon as experienced by the interviewee (and indeed the interviewer). Philosophers such as Heidegger and Sartre emphasised the concept that all experiences must be understood in the context of the person having that specific experience and their interpretation of it; attention is therefore focused on the way individuals reflect on and experience their own lifeworld. Walking around enhances our opportunity to understand the lifeworld of the participant and their experiences as they interpret them, and importantly how we interpret the interviewees' words in the light of our own experiences walking in a particular environment. The main aim of IPA is to understand participants lived experiences as much as possible by prompting participants to share their experiences and provide as much concrete detail about those experiences as possible (Langdrige, 2008). In our research, these details are prompted by walking around the ruins of the old towns and by revisiting those places significant to participants. Langdrige clarifies that in this process the researcher is an active element since their bias, opinions and values cannot be eliminated; it is therefore fundamental for the researcher to be aware of them in order to understand what they bring to the analysis (eg their own background, knowledge and personal experience).

Results

Amatrice

The first interview was conducted in Amatrice. The participant, G, lives in one of the small villages that constitute Amatrice that was completely destroyed during the earthquake in 2016. The first part of the interview focused on his own and his family's losses including their houses and business. We walked to his house and his parents' house where they were the night of the earthquake. There is nothing left of his house and his parents' house was severely damaged by the event. G took me to his parents' house. Once there, G became very emotional and I could feel not only his love for that house, but also his frustration because he and his family are still not allowed to fix it due to government restrictions.

"I feel sorry because I know that the house is okay ... even more for my dad, he comes here every day.... it just doesn't make any sense to abandon it ... abandoning a house that took him an entire life to build ... I am angry because they just won't allow me to fix it."

After having been to his parents' house, we slowly walk back to the campsite where his entire family resides. At that point, the interview seems to be reaching an end since there was nowhere else to go. Instead, G. decides to go to the town centre in Amatrice. He wants to show me what is left of Amatrice and how it has been changed by the recent construction of two shopping centres. Walking around the

town prompted G to show me more about Amatrice; this would have not happened if the interview was conducted by sitting around a table.

Once we arrived in the town centre, I felt overwhelmed by the tragedy that the earthquake has brought to Amatrice. The entire town is still surrounded by rubble. G shows me where his family's shop was and all the meeting points where the community used to gather. He tells me how everything was different before the earthquake and I could sense his anger and frustration. Walking around the town gave the interviewer the opportunity to understand the loss and embrace his emotional state. I found myself feeling angry and frustrated, wanting to do something. I shared his negative feelings for the mayor who abandoned the community. This intersubjectivity is strongly represented here because the interviewer is in the place with G. There is no sense of objectivity, of the interviewer being outside the spatial world of the interview. Once we get to the shopping centres, G explains everything about how the decision was made to build them and who built them. Both shopping centres look out of place and I can feel all of his frustration while he talks about them.

G: "See ... I'll show you both of them ... then we can stop ..."

I: "No, they are crazy"

G: "Well ... this is exactly the first thing we said as well"

I: "I am sorry, but they are horrible"

G: "Because you haven't seen the inside yet ..." (with sarcasm)

At the end of the interview, I asked him what his thoughts regarding this kind of interview were. He told me he was interviewed several times after the earthquake, but the interviewers seemed to be only interested about the event itself and whether he had seen anyone dying. He told me he did not understand the point of those kind of interviews because they did not focus on the present which illustrated the importance of temporality – the interview takes place in the present, even though it refers to the past - perhaps even more so when walking around critical sites.

L'Aquila

The second interview was conducted in L'Aquila. P, was born and grew up in L'Aquila. Her interview was very emotional; P struggles with anxiety and when at the places symbol of her life after the earthquake, she needed some time to process her emotional state in order to continue with the interview. This happened especially when P decided to show me where she lived for almost six years after the earthquake before she was able to move back to her family house. In the aftermath of the event, L'Aquila residents were relocated to different areas called New Towns (Progetto Case) where government bodies built big buildings to house the entire population. Each one of these New Towns

were located in different areas and P and her parents ended up being separated from the rest of their family members which had a major impact on their mental health:

“... the final destination was chosen by them (government bodies) We wanted to stay close to each other and instead my brother with his young daughters and a newborn were sent to Preturo which is on the opposite side of Paganica 2 ... there was a list of preferences, but it was just a joke ...”

Once at the New Town, P appears agitated and goes quiet for few minutes looking around the place. Through walking around the area, P has the opportunity to relive the time she was there and all the emotions she may have felt (this temporality has a potential impact on the ways in which interviewees may construct their understanding, not only during the interview but into the future). This gives me the opportunity to try and understand what living there meant for her and to share her emotions.

I: How do you feel?

P: I feel weird, I feel as if I am here but not at the same time ... Sorry, I am getting nervous (starts vigorously coughing)

I: Don't worry. We are not in a rush

P: This is all anxiety (keeps coughing)

I: How do you feel? Are you sure you want to continue?

P: Yes, yes ... I am sweating, I don't know whether it's the heat or because I am agitated ...”

P introduces me to her neighbours, but after 10 minutes she decides it is too much and wants to go to the city centre where she used to meet all of her friends from when she was a young girl. Once there, P shows me around the centre and tells me stories about these 'columns' called 'pilastrì' where different groups of people would stand around and spend time together. P tells me she does not go to the city centre very often now; she tells me that going there makes her sad:

“...the absence of the city centre ... we were used to go to, especially around the columns, from when we were young. L'Aquila was a lively town ... there were many shops, restaurants, bars, the market every morning, churches, everything was there. I basically lived there ... it is sad ... I can't go there anymore ...”

Towards the end of the interview, I ask P how she feels about this type of interview. She seems pleased with it, she feels that it has helped her talking about L'Aquila.

I: What do you think of this type of interview?

P: I like it. Let's say that you need it for your thesis and it is educational for you, for me it's a release ... I like telling mine and L'Aquila story ..."

I: I interviewed before but sitting around a table ... I wanted to see the places and try to understand better ..."

P: ... I think it's important for both me and you ..."

Evaluation of the interviews

This brief analysis showed that the walking interview can be successful at eliciting relevant information from interviewees. As far as we are aware this is the first time walking interviews have been used at the site of a natural disaster, and the behaviour of both interviewees and interviewer demonstrated differences from the normal sitting interview, mainly in terms of the ways in which emotion was expressed but also in the closer emotional involvement of the interviewer. In a sense the emotional expression of the interviewee was deeper than is usually found in sedentary interviews, though this is difficult to fully determine as there is no specific comparison. This meant it took more time to undertake the interview, but a greater depth of meaning and emotion was established.

The intensity of the emotions (including anger at the authorities) felt by the interviewer has both advantages and disadvantages. It is positive as it will mean a greater degree of empathy between the interviewer and interviewee, but there is the danger that this intensity of emotion may detract the interviewer from attending to the needs of the interview. Furthermore, these two interviews are just part of a series of interviews involving the walking interview. The interviewer found that the increased emotion experienced through the walking interview meant it was important to take time off between interviews and also there was a need for appropriate supervision. This is in addition to the interviewees wanting to take time during the interviews to deal with their emotions, as shown in the examples.

The examples also show that the direction of the interview can be more under the control of the interviewee. The original choice of sites may change, as P indicates when she wants to go to the city centre. This is positive in allowing flexibility and in enabling the interviewee to have some control, and to be able to direct the interview towards the sites of special memory that may not have been decided on at the start of the interview. Against this is the potential risk to the interviewer who needs to ensure that the third party is aware of the changes to the interview schedule but does not want to interrupt the interview to inform them of the change.

If the interviews had been conducted by sitting at a table, G's interview would have not moved to Amatrice town centre and the interviewer would have not entirely understand his frustration; and it would have not been possible to completely understand P's difficulty in living in the Progetto Case for six years because we would have not been able to see her psychological and physiological reaction to it. Going to those places significant for participants' life before and after the earthquakes prompted them to remember important events. Going to different locations helps participants to recover and share traumatic memories.

A car was needed at times to move from one place to another depending on interviewees' needs. The interview did not stop while in the car, with the interviewees continuing their narrative and talking to the interviewer about their experiences throughout the journey. While this is beneficial as it keeps the interview flowing there is a potential danger in driving while interviewing. While interviews can be recorded 'hands free' in a car, the driver, whether interviewer or interviewee, must focus on paying attention to the road, so ideally the interview should be suspended for this period, or if possible, use public transport instead.

IPA was appropriate for the analysis of the walking interviews as it allowed the interviewer to deeply reflect on participants' interpretation of their experiences and the emotions related to specific places, and on the importance the interviewer's emotions and points of view play when conducting the walking interview. The double hermeneutic is strongly at play here, with the development of interpersonal experiences, particularly relating to emotions on seeing some of the key sites.

Broader implications of the walking interview

Walking interviews have the potential to improve the quality of the data collected through enhancing the experience of both the interviewer and the interviewee. This methodology gives the opportunity to the interviewer to really walk in the interviewees' shoes enhancing what is called perceived perspective taking. Perceived perspective taking means actively considering a specific situation from someone else's point of view (Batson & Shaw, 1991). This is made possible through the opportunity to see with our own eyes those places that have meant something to participants and feel their same emotions to some degree. There has been extensive research regarding the importance of perspective taking when conducting research (Goldstein, et al., 2014). For instance, perspective taking increases liking of and compassion towards the target (Batson, et al., 1997), but also helps to facilitate social interaction by promoting smoother and more coordinated interpersonal exchanges (Galinsky, et al., 2008). Perspective taking as well as empathy are fundamental in qualitative research (Jones & Ficklin, 2012).

The common power dynamics often found in interview methodologies were not present. In our example both the interviewees and interviewer quickly became very comfortable around each other, so sharing emotions was made easier for both parties. Newcomb (1956) showed that believing

another individual is concerned about one's well-being generally increases positive feelings toward that individual. Perspective takers experience and demonstrate greater empathy compared to those who do not.

Walking interviews need to take account of the weather in terms of appropriate clothing and whether the walk should be postponed. The problem with the latter is that most research is conducted on a tight schedule and it is not easy to re-schedule interviews. This seemingly minor point can have major implications for the conduct of the research.

The walking interview has proved to be very useful in the context of the earthquakes. It provided the opportunity for participants and the interviewer to share powerful thoughts and emotions in relation to specific sites that were of importance to the participant. The flexibility of the method is critical, as a site that acts as lieu de memoire for one person has no relevance to another. This is a specific approach to the walking interview that is relevant when there are specific sites of interest to the participants. A similar example would be walking around a battlefield with veteran participants or exploring childhood memories by walking around the places frequented by the participants when they were children. This approach would also be effective when exploring workplaces or holiday sites. These are all place-responsive, where the actual site of walking will impact on what the participant says, and how they interact with the interviewer.

A walking interview where there is no place responsiveness, but the interview takes place while walking, is outside this discussion. The walking interview employed in this paper aims at bringing the interviewee back to the scene of what happened and to their significant places, providing them with the opportunity to recall more effectively the impact of what happened to them psychologically and socially. However, when using a walking interview where there is no place responsiveness, there might still be factors that will change the nature of the interview, such as walking side by side without making eye contact as often, or the simple exercise involved.

One note of caution, while we may appear to be comparing the walking interview favourably against the traditional sedentary interview, this is not the intention. First, we do not have the data to make such a comparison at this stage, and second, the sense of place is still important for those taking part in the sedentary interview, as the place of the interview may be noisy, the seats uncomfortable, there may be interruptions, and so on.

Conclusions

Over the last few years, there has been a growing interest in qualitative research in places and health because these methods allow to gather richer accounts of participants' perceptions and subjective interpretations about the places in which they live (Dennis et al., 2009).

Walking interview represent one of those methods that have gained the attention of a variety of disciplines, from social sciences to geography to anthropology (Carpiano, 2009; Anderson, 2004; Reed, 2002). This is because walking interviews can generate richer data through participants' relationship with their familiar surroundings (Evans & Jones, 2011). We have showed that walking around with the interviewees not only enhance the quality of data collected, but it also allows the interviewer to engage in the interview on a different level which cannot be achieved with a traditional sedentary interview. We are not claiming that this methodology will benefit all forms of research, but there is certainly a place for it in a wide range of areas. Research has already been developed about the importance of using walking methodology to understand the relationship people establish with their surrounding environments and their subjective experience as pedestrian in urban settings; this might lead to improvements in our knowledge around urban planning and public health which are critical (Miaux, et al., 2010)

The protocol presented in this article is aimed at those who wish to try out this technique and is a first attempt at such a protocol at the site of a natural disaster. This research is ongoing and will generate more detailed analyses, not only to increase our understanding of the human impact of earthquakes, but also to further develop our understanding of the strengths and relevance of the walking interview as a valid technique.

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