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Interviews that attend to emplacement: the "walk-through" method (Paper)

Abstract
Within library and information studies (LIS), there is growing awareness of the role of the body and its surroundings in people's information and knowledge experiences. Predominant data collection methods, such as the sit-down interview, should be reexamined in light of this awareness. This paper examines interview methods theoretically and empirically. First, this paper introduces the concept of emplacement, the interrelationship of body, mind, and place, as a useful lens for challenging conventional interviewing practices. Second, this paper delineates the "walk-through" interview, which in a study of undergraduates' information behaviours prompted richer detail from participants than did "sit-down" interviews.

Résumé

The interview is a prevalent data collection method in library and information studies (LIS), particularly among studies of people's information behaviours and practices (Julien, Pecoskie, & Reed, 2011; McKechnie, Baker, Greenwood, & Julien, 2002). Despite the enduring popularity of interviews, there has been little investigation of their spatial, material, and sensory aspects. In LIS, as in other disciplines, the place where an interview occurs "is largely perceived as a *tabula rasa* on which social actions (the interview) unfold" (Sin 2003, p. 306, emphasis original). Within LIS, there is increasing acknowledgement of, and interest in, embodied and situated information and ways of knowing. This fuels an imperative to question the predominant *tabula rasa* perception of interview sites, and to examine interview methods, so that conceptual developments can be incorporated into researchers' future interviewing practices.

This CAIS/ACSI paper contributes to this examination in three ways. First, it scrutinizes the concept of "emplacement," or people's embodied, dynamic ties to their surroundings. Emplacement has roots in anthropology; it has been proposed as a new paradigm for the "interrelationship of body-mind-environment" (Howes 2005, p. 7). To study emplacement is to study "how bodily knowing is formed as part of a moving world" (Bäckström 2014, p. 752). Emplacement is distinct from the concept of embodiment, and has yet to be characterized in detail within LIS. Interest in embodiment is increasing within our discipline, with a growing number of researchers drawing attention to the role of the body in people's information and knowledge experiences (e.g., recently, Cox, Griffin, & Hartel, 2017; Keilty, 2016; Lueg, 2015; Olsson, 2016; Olsson & Lloyd, 2017). While embodiment brings needed focus to the body, emplacement centres on the role of place in people's identities and experiences. Emplacement enables us to reexamine information and knowledge practices and question how, in order to enact such practices, people always inhabit, and move within, places.

Next, drawing on emplacement as well as additional work from ethnographers such as Kusenbach (2003), this paper critiques the sit-down interview, parses the implications of conducting sit-down interviews, and describes potential areas of study for LIS that would benefit from more thoughtfully emplaced methods. We argue that as LIS turns toward more holistic understandings of people's information experiences, we must also turn toward more varied and nuanced methods.

Finally, reporting select findings from a study of undergraduate students' information behaviours, this paper describes a method that we define as the "walk-through" interview. Walk-through interviewing is a mobile interviewing technique that is conducted after a sit-down interview; the participant leads the researcher on a walk around places that they first described in the sit-down interview, providing more details while (re)experiencing the place. When participants describe places they define as significant (such as a campus library or lounge) while walking through them, they can mention new details that they did not recall during their sit-down interviews. By placing the individual back, physically, in the space that prompted their initial thoughts, the research team gains a more fulsome and holistic view of the phenomena under study.

In her influential work on the "go along" method, Kusenbach (2003) provides a critique of the sit-down interview. Traditional sit-down interviews keep participants from engaging in "'natural' activities, typically taking them out of the environments where those activities take place" (Kusenbach 2003, p. 459). By not considering the interview site or the sedentary quality of the interview event, traditional sit-down interviews may downplay the role of emplacement in people's ways of knowing, feeling, and remembering. As such, sit-down interviews reflect a dualist way of thinking: the mind and the body are treated as separate entities. The state of the body in the interview and the body's potential contributions to the interview are overshadowed by a focus on verbalising memories, perceptions, ideas, or other expressions of the thinking mind. In contrast, the "walk-through" interview allows for in-the-moment experiences of mind and body that can help participants to recall and/or re-experience their ideas in the real-time

context of the physical space. This can help researchers to tap into participants' views more holistically by accounting for place-based contexts.

Other studies have also addressed the sedentary, decontextualized nature of sit-down interviews. These studies have corroborated the sense of connection with the environment that walking interviews provide (Evans and Jones, 2011; Kusenbach, 2003; Pink, 2008; Riley, 2010). More broadly, Sheller and Urry (2006) assert that movement — of people, material, and information — must be accounted for in disciplines where "sedentarist" theories normalising stability and "bounded places" have predominated (p. 208). This "new mobilities paradigm," which takes people's emplacement as a central tenet, has propagated methods such as the walk-through interview reported in this paper.

The study that used the walk-through interview method explored undergraduates' information behaviours through interviews with 18 undergraduate students. Participants discussed their university experiences and were asked to identify and describe places that they felt were conducive to effective study as well as places that they used for socialising. A goal of the study was to explore the role of campus-based information resources and information spaces in fostering (or hindering) students' academic achievements. Select findings will be reported to showcase the usefulness and applicability of the walk-through interview method as a tool for exploring individuals' information behaviours.

Participants took part in two different interviews conducted during a single session: first, a stationary or "sit-down" interview, which took place in the office of the researcher; and, second, a "walk-through" interview to explore participant-identified information spaces. During the stationary interview, participants were asked questions about their ideal study spaces for academic success with many participants identifying and describing areas on campus that were their preferred study or social spaces. The stationary interview was followed by a "walk-through" interview, in which participants took the researcher on a walk around the places that they described in the stationary interview phase. During the walk-through interviews, participants clarified details they provided in the sit-down interview, they recalled new details that they had not mentioned previously, and, in some cases, they raised entirely new topics beyond those first explored in the sit-down interview.

This paper will conclude with observations about the potential applications and limitations of the walk-through interview as a method, with a particular focus on theoretical understandings of emplacement to guide researchers' experiences with the research approach. As the study used both sit-down and walk-through interviews, the differences between the two approaches, and their complementary strengths, was revealed. The sit-down interview allows for focused, undistracted discussion in a "private" space. The walk-through elicits greater detail because participants are powerfully prompted by perceiving and moving in a place. At the same time, walk-through interviews present many challenges and they make greater demands on participants and researcher alike. By using walk-through interviews alongside traditional, sit-down interviews, researchers can elicit new levels of rich, trustworthy detail from

participants. As such, the walk-through interview serves as an example of how a traditional *tabula rasa* method can be adapted to elicit emplaced knowledge.

This paper addresses the conference theme in several ways. By introducing and applying a concept that is new to LIS, emplacement, this paper connects to the conference theme of new and innovative research approaches. The paper also contributes to another conference theme, the development and future of LIS research, by providing an example, the walk-through interview, of how interview methods can evolve in response to conceptual development and diversification.

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