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Researching at Sea: exploring the 'swim-along' interview method.

Highlights

- Introduces an innovative 'swim-along' mobile method
- Outlines the challenges of developing the 'swim-along' mobile method
- Compares 'swim-along' with more traditional 'sit-down' interviews
- Explores implications for mobile methods and research / participant interactions

Abstract

Interest in researching embodied experiences of activity connected to therapeutic landscapes, spaces or places has led to a range of evolving methods that aim to move beyond traditional sit-down, talk-based qualitative modes of researching. Following the sensory turn, this paper explores a novel 'swim-along' method used to interview people whilst swimming immersed in sea water. By comparing this to a traditional sit-down interview, the paper examines the implications for deepening our understanding of visceral, sensory, embodied experiences, the methods we can use to access them and how these structure researcher / participant interaction.

Key words

Mobile methods, open water swimming, blue space, embodiment, phenomenology

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Declaration of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest

Introducing the swim-along method

Researchers that explore the embodied experiences of activity connected to therapeutic landscapes, spaces or places have evolved a range of methods that aim to move beyond traditional sit-down, talk-based research. These methods, variously described as mobile, go-along, sensory, visceral, haptic and/or embodied (Brown, 2017; Watson et al., 2019) capture movement or pleasurable sensations through space, time and matter, accessing fleeting, in-the-moment embodied and 'beyond words' experiences (Brown, 2017). Although many of these methods have been used to explore the experience of being in or alongside water, (Merchant, 2011a; Merchant, 2011b; Bell et al., 2015b; Straughan, 2012; Scott, 2010; Humberstone, 2011; Throsby, 2013; Hockey and Collinson, 2007; Finlay et al., 2015; Foley, 2017), a 'swim-along' method, to interview people whilst immersed in sea water swimming, had yet to be tried.

Researchers interested in the experience of activity, argue that to 'grasp at' the embodied and emplaced aspects of activity it is vital to engage with the sensuous and sensing sporting body whilst in motion as 'sports participants hear, smell, see, touch and move within their particular sporting environments, whether hockey pitch, mountain face, ice rink or squash court' (Hockey and Collinson, 2007 p123). Without moving within these environments it is not possible to fully access the experience as 'locomotion not cognition must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity' (Ingold, 2000 p166). A shared embodied experience requires researchers to move alongside their participants (Hockey and Collinson, 2006) and, to truly understand, to join in (Humberstone, 2011). 'Movement with' becomes a way of 'attuning' the researcher to the mobile practice in question (Spinney, 2015).

'Walk-along' or 'go-along' interviews are also part of the methodological toolkit of geographers, health researchers and social scientists interested in the experience of place (May and Lewis, 2019). Interviews are conducted, and data gathered, whilst the participants move through the setting that is being explored. This allows for more subtle exploration into the 'sensory experience, embodiment, emplacement, about what changes and what stays the same, and about the configuration and reconfiguration of assemblies of objects, spaces, people, ideas and information' (Büscher and Urry, 2009 p110). Offering additional insights into the physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of space as a result of the visible embodied and emotional responses in situ (Kusenbach, 2003);

(Carpiano, 2009). Traditional sit-down interviews are challenged as unable to deal with such fleeting, sensory and emotional experiences (Law and Urry, 2004).

Recently, May & Lewis (2019) have questioned the growing perception that walk-along interviews are 'superior' suggesting sit-down interviews should not be simply dismissed as static, talk based, dis-embodied and detached (Kusenbach, 2003; Carpiano, 2009). Like Merriman they invite researchers to ask what is gained by actually being there and to interrogate whether mobile approaches really do enable the researcher to 'more accurately know and represent the experience of their research subjects' (2014 p8). After all, despite being present a researcher may still have a different experience, as everyone brings their own 'embodied socio-cultural baggage' (Merchant, 2011a p55).

Both swim-along and sit-down interviews were utilised within a project in which we all had differing roles (HD principal investigator, sea swimmer and 'I' in this paper; KA & CD supervision; KA indoor pool swimmer and CD sea swimmer). Swim-along interviews offered rich deep accounts of the embodied, sensory, haptic pleasures and visceral delights of sea swimming as well as the uncertainty and potential danger; experiences not fully captured by the traditional retrospective, sit-down interview. Whilst the sit-down interview offered a broader temporal perspective so couldn't be easily dismissed or seen as inferior. In addition, the swim-along method offered rich insights into relations of power, trust and reciprocity in our research processes. Swim-along interviews have the potential to access uniquely immersive understandings involved in sea swimming and so contribute to the emerging canon of visceral embodied and sensory methodologies. They also provide new insights into conventional understandings of qualitative research norms governing the interview process.

In this paper we will examine the technical, ethical and conceptual challenges of the project, explore how the two interview approaches, swim-along and sit-down, influenced the information that was generated and outline further implications for deepening our understanding of visceral, sensory, embodied experiences and the methods we use to access these.

A bit of background

(HD) *Whilst I am walking down towards the sea with my fellow swimmers, passers-by often ask: "is it cold? How long do you last? How far do you go?" And they shake their heads in disbelief. I like to think they are curious because they would quite like to try open water swimming themselves.*

Since I started swimming regularly, an increasing number of people have been enticed into immersing their body in icy cold water (British Triathlon Federation, 2018; Gibson, 2018). This growing fascination is also reflected in the many newspaper articles, TV programs and books now written about the experience. An activity once fringe, the domain of a few eccentrics, is rapidly becoming part of the mainstream.

Swimming (if you include indoor and outdoor) is one of the most popular sports in the UK, particularly amongst women (Sport England, 2019). The benefits of open water swimming to mental health and wellbeing have been repeated so often it has become accepted wisdom despite very little research having been undertaken (Stubbs, 2017). As a sea swimmer and psychologist, my interest was originally a personal one but, as a result of a conversation in the sea, I re-entered the world of academia. I spoke at workshops and conferences, and began to explore how the benefits of sea swimming might be researched. Finally I gained funding from the National Institute of Health Research to undertake the project described in this article, under the supervision of the second and third authors.

I wanted to get as close to the experience of swimming as I could to deliver an 'insider's view' of sea swimming. With very little research so far on the subject, a focus on insight over measurement seemed essential. As the body is fundamental to the experience of swimming, an embodied approach was chosen. Embodied research extends what constitutes knowledge to value the sensuous as well as that articulated by the rational mind; to seek out the 'knowing' embedded within practices that is not easily expressed in spoken words (Pink, 2011). The importance of place is also recognised. Once seen as only the material characteristic of a locality, place is now better understood as an event and as 'the coming together of the previously interrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing' (Massey, 2005 p141). As sea swimming is an embodied practice undertaken in watery surroundings, where the 'knowing' is embedded and difficult to put into, or is

beyond, words, I wanted to develop a swim-along method to gain access to the fleeting, in-the-moment, embodied aspects a sit-down interview alone would miss.

Challenges of developing a swim-along method

The first methodological challenge was to reliably record conversations in the sea. I considered following the swimmer in a kayak or on a paddle board to keep the equipment dry and to make recording easier. During pilot interviews, and as with other mobile researchers, I discovered I needed to interview whilst alongside the participant so our shared experience could inform my understanding and questioning. I tried different recording equipment attached to either the pilot participant or myself. I finally opted to wear a waterproof camera on my head and attach a digital recorder encased in a protective waterproof cover to a float. I dragged the float behind me and pulled it between us when talking. The participant could also use it as a support to rest on if needed. Interviewing and recording whilst out of the water would have been more reliable, but being alongside the participant and engaging in the activity elicited additional observations discussed beneath.

Although I felt confident that a swim-along method could be undertaken safely, its novelty presented challenges for research ethics clearance. Mobile methods are generally perceived as 'risky', as they are not undertaken in researcher-controlled environments (Foley et al., 2019). Ethics reviewers had legitimate concerns regarding participant safety (Adams-Hutcheson, 2017), especially in a hazardous open water environment. To mitigate these risks and to ensure informed consent, participants, recruited through the swimming club that I belong to, had to have been members for at least a year. My population was therefore restricted to experienced sea swimmers familiar with the location. They were able to decide what constituted dangerous and unsafe swimming conditions and so were able to remain within their safe limits. As an experienced local sea swimmer and qualified lifeguard my knowledge was also skilled, local and technically proficient regarding sea and swimmer safety. The float holding the recorder was chosen as it could be used as a rescue device if required.

As the club is not large, approximately 180 members, it was likely that the participants were at least familiar to me, making me an 'insider' to the area of investigation. Being an 'insider' or an 'outsider' inevitably has an impact on the information gathered. 'Insider' researchers

can struggle to conform to appropriate standards of intellectual rigour, due to their having a personal stake and emotional investment (Alvesson, 2003; Anderson and Herr, 1999). They can also be unable to 'make the familiar strange' (Hawkins, 1990 p417) as the material is so commonplace to them (Edwards, 2002 p77). Our familiarity could also have an impact on the experience of the participants. Club members may have felt under pressure to participate, or give consent due to a sense of obligation. The participant information confirmed I held no positions in the club and had no influence over them as members. Any reticent members were not encouraged to participate. I also requested participants to not disclose anything they felt uncomfortable with, as this was unnecessary for the study.

Like other researchers interested in the embodied experience of a physical activity (e.g. (Allen-Collinson and Leledaki, 2015; Potter, 2008), Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of embodiment proved invaluable. Merleau-Ponty was influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and De Beauvoir (Moran, 2002), but highlighted the body as central to experience. He argued that thought and reflection do not attach to the flesh from beyond it, but arise through it (May, 2005 p522), locating subjectivity not in the mind or consciousness, but *in the body* (Young, 2005 p35). He maintained that we cannot separate our body from the world (May, 2005), as 'to be born is both to be born of the world and to be born into the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Merleau-Ponty understood human experience as a complex mix of consciousness, body and environment (Moran, 2002).

Mobile methods align with a phenomenological approach. Husserl (2006) argues that we experience the lived body differently 'in the now', 'in the just past' and 'in recollection' so to ask people to speak about the lived experience afterwards risks losing the 'effervescence' and 'over-flowing' nature of lived experience (Spinney, 2015). The longer it is between the event and the sharing of it, the more likely it is to be complicated by memory with elements mis-remembered or not remembered at all (Murchison, 2010). Phenomenology recognises that, in the same way that a human experience or being is always in process, our understanding can never be complete (Dahlberg et al., 2009). Humans can never grasp the world in its entirety and can only understand the world according to the mode in which we inhabit it (Finlay, 2011). In short, the appearance of an object will change depending on the perceiver's location (Willig, 2013).

Using the Swim-along Interview Method

Recruitment and interviews were conducted during September to October 2017. An email was sent to all the swimming club's members, with information about the project, inviting them to contact me if they wanted to participate. Respondents who had been a member of the club for less than a year were excluded. Of those remaining, purposive and convenience sampling was used to select three male and three female swimmers aged from 38 to 73. Three were parents and one had significant caring responsibilities, all were white British. A semi-structured interview schedule, developed and refined during pilot interviews, guided both swim-along and sit-down interviews.

The swimming interviews, lasting between 17 minutes to 41 minutes, began in the changing room once we were ready to swim and ended as we walked back up the beach. All participants chose to wear a swimming costume, swim hat and goggles and no wetsuit. Each participant was asked to undertake a 'normal' swim. They were invited to attend to their experience as it unfolded and to indicate when they wanted to stop and to share some of that experience. I would swim over, if I wasn't already beside them, and encourage them to reflect on whatever was going on for them at that moment whilst I video and audio-recorded them. Participants, on the whole, stopped every few minutes. Depending on the sea conditions and the speed of the participants, I would sometimes wear fins to help me keep up.

Once we had changed, following the swim, a further interview was undertaken and audio recorded. This was so we could explore the experience of swimming without having to negotiate the water or worry about getting cold. As we had just swum together, this swim was also used as a benchmark against previous swims and to explore how it compared. These interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 55 minutes.

Semi-structured interview schedule	
During the swim	- What thoughts, feelings, physical sensations are you experiencing? - Which sensations are you attending to, which are you not? - Which senses are most important? - How has your mood changed over the course of the swim, what seems to impact on this? - What thoughts are uppermost in your mind?
After the swim	- Thinking about this swim what did you notice about the experience; changes in your body, changes in your mood, changes in your thoughts. Paying more attention did anything surprise you? - What motivates you to swim? Why swimming rather than another sport? - Do you think regular sea swimming has had an impact on your mood? If so, how and in what ways? - Has regular sea swimming had an impact on your body? - Are there any negative aspects to sea swimming?

Differences between Swim-Along and Sit-Down Interviews

As both swim-along and sit-down interviews were undertaken, how and in what ways each method illuminated differing or similar aspects of the swimming experience could be compared. Although it would not be accurate to suggest there was a clear distinction between the areas covered, the different approaches did seem to engender different perspectives and foci. The 'in water' and 'out of the water' questions, generated through conversations with swimmers during pilot interviews, were different. This could have impacted on the information gathered by each method as the topic of conversation shapes the sensory experiences that are elicited (May and Lewis, 2019).

Swim-along Interview

In the swim-along interview participants were invited to attend to their experiences as they emerged or unfolded in the blue place frequented by our club (Foley, 2017). All participants reported that this process heightened aspects of swimming that they would otherwise not have noticed. Greater reflection on the activity revealed many details familiar to regular sea swimmers that would not normally be vocalised or even remembered back on land. These reflections highlighted the significance of the stages or phases to sea swimming and the specific nature of the space or place during a swim:

> *I have just got to the stage where I am totally comfortable now. I have recovered from 'oh it is a bit cold but I am in'. Got my body moving a bit and I don't know, today, just this glorious silky stuff (participant 1).*

Like other walk-along interviews, being in a particular place was a trigger to the participant reflecting on their experience:

> *Here in the lee of the pier you often get the water a lot calmer, especially in this westerly wind, and it can be quite ripply in other places, and you get to the bit sitting in the lee of the pier and it can be glassy smooth and it is just incredible when it is like that (participant 3)*

In addition to the trigger of the place, the embodied experience of the movement in the water created meaningful experiences in swims as well as eliciting memories:

> *I was just thinking of something that I am not getting today because it is flat, something that is incredibly tremendous. You know when it is choppy and you are swimming really well? It is almost like you are in tune, well there are moments when you are swimming where you are actually really in tune with the water, and sometimes it is with the swell, you are really swimming well with the swell, or if it is choppy you are really taking, I don't know, using the sea to sort of help you move forwards a lot. When it is flatter I think it is probably more about how your stroke is I think… (participant 1).*

This experience linked them to other more recent swims, to swimming experiences we shared, and to biographical embodied memories:

> *We just swam for a minute, two minutes, and a couple of big rollers came in, and I actually squealed like a little kid! I could see one coming and I thought right, that is going to break so I went under it, and you feel the wave take you up, and it reminds me as if I am six years old, and you used to play on the beach and in the small waves. So now I am totally relaxed, slightly out of breath but again that is because it is a physical thing (participant 5).*

One of the most striking outcomes was how much of the experience was not always positive. The raw, challenging, harshness of the experience was very evident in the descriptions given whilst swimming. Attending to these as they unfolded gave insights into the more challenging and less pleasurable aspects of the swim experienced through the body of the swimmer:

> *the most anxious that I ever get, is probably, I don't know, the last 50ms coming in. It is strange.... I think the most anxious of all times is when you are swimming and your marker on the pier, or somewhere, and you realise that you are not getting in. you know you are in a bit of rip, and then the heart beat does go up (participant 5).*

After the interviews had been analysed, I invited participants to come together to reflect on the swim-along interview experience. Participants reported that 'being in it together' allowed them to connect with their experiences. They noted the enhanced meaning of the statements they made:

> *Because you're thinking about the process of treading water … is there a wave coming? … you are actually thinking about keeping your head above water and going with the waves, so the things that are important come out (participant 5)*

They felt that back on land they would not have remembered much of what they had shared:

> *Things that you are thinking about there and then you wouldn't necessarily take back to the shore with you (participant 4)*

There were times during the swim-along interviews, however, when our bodies were affected by the experience of being in the water in ways that directly interfered with the interviews. Sometimes I was focused on staying safe in the water and so was unable to attend fully to my participant. The pressure of needing to keep swimming, so as to not get too cold, also resulted in times during the swim-along interviews where the participant asked if we could come back to a topic to expand further. Being in the water changed our experience of time by creating a sense of urgency in the interviews. Time was also regulated by the ephemeral nature of the sea in its temperature, waves, sprays and tides and by our bodies as they became tired and cold, jubilant and fearful.

Sit-Down Interviews

Although the swim-along interviews encouraged a focus on unfolding embodied, sensory, visceral experiences, there were embodied responses during the sit-down discussions too. Participants clearly used their embodied memories to inform their responses:

> *The most enjoyable thing I do in the sea is when you get higher tide, with big waves but waves that are not curling coming in, is doing butterfly into them … and I am no butterflier, I am useless at butterfly but just to do 50 strokes of butterfly, but then keeping under the water until you feel your body rising and then pulling your arms out as you are at the top of the wave and then the wave has gone and you're, and you feel, wait a minute, I'm out.. two thirds of your body is out of the water and then you go down, and then you say, I don't need to come up and you go down and you wait for the next wave and you repeat it. And if you manage to catch that wave, three waves, four waves, that is the best thing. I would never get that in the pool. Would never get that in the lake (participant 5).*

Although the swim-along interview allowed a greater interest in the moment-to-moment experience, the sit-down interview permitted fuller consideration, reflection and comparison of swims. The swim-along interviews began and ended with the swim. It can be argued, however, that the impact of swimming begins long before the swim, as swimmers feel the need for a swim or are affected by whatever has happened prior to the swim, and the impact of swimming can continue into the rest of the day. These ripple effects were better explored in the sit-down interview. Without the pressure of getting

cold, negotiating waves or getting tired, the participants could be more expansive in the discussions. Participants could demonstrate the importance of the character of the water on their swim and how they experienced and valued different swims by sensing it through their bodies. There was more space to reflect on the longevity of the mind/body impact of swimming, with participants exploring how they had come to swimming, memories of other swims, the current place of swimming in their lives and how it had changed, or changed, them over time. This was time to reflect on their history, their changing identity and hopes and to explore a swimmer's 'point of view' (Wacquant, 1995). The embodied experience for a researcher, while interviewing, was also quite different. The swim-along interviews tended to feel more intense, whereas the sit-down interviews more relaxed particularly as we both enjoyed the post-swim high.

Discussion

The theoretical and methodological implications of this novel swim-along method reveal further insights into embodied, sensory, visceral and affective activity based experiences, especially in blue spaces. The sea is a powerful, uncertain body of water in which immersion is desired, is full of pleasure, and yet, equally fearful, uncontrollable and at times dangerous. The sea presents unique assemblages of experiences in which traditional qualitative research questions of power, trust or reciprocity, and insider researcher / participant relations emerged, were entangled then revealed.

Trust, Reciprocity and Power

Although the intention of the swim-along method was to gain access to a 'normal' swim, we had to make adaptations that altered the swim experience and more surprisingly the relationship between the researcher and participant. Interviewing in the sea created obligations, governed by the university, to ensure the safety of both researcher and participant. This created a social hierarchy where, as both researcher and lifeguard, I became responsible for our safety and for deciding whether the interview would take place. Normally when we swim in the club, choices about risk are the personal responsibility of the swimmer but for the purposes of this research, the balance of responsibility shifted, even when I was not the more competent and experienced swimmer. Although safety measures

were necessary within a research context, the fact of doing the swim-along interviews sanitised some of the risks and challenges of a 'normal' swim.

Other aspects of the swim-along interview upset the typical power dynamics between researcher and participant. One participant was a much faster swimmer than me so had to keep waiting, another was more comfortable in the larger waves and another swim had to be cut short as I was getting too cold. In addition, we both wore swimming costumes that, although familiar, placed our bodies more on view than usual attire for conducting interviews. We were in a risky environment together and so we were keeping an eye on each other, aware of our vulnerabilities.

Swimming alongside my participants, recording interviews with a camera on my head, made the interviewing more challenging. I had to negotiate the waves, the cold, and changes in my body, ensuring the microphone and video camera worked properly whilst also thinking about questions. I was therefore not always as present as I wanted to be. The participants were also aware of the equipment recording their experience. Although perhaps a more discrete, and less invasive, approach than being in a boat alongside, the recording equipment nonetheless had a presence for both of us.

Insider Researching

To use the swim-along method the researcher must be a competent swimmer. As the researcher, I therefore brought my own prior understanding of the potential benefits of sea swimming to the conversations. The participants knew me, and knew that I was an experienced swimmer, and this would also have impacted on the kinds of knowledge produced. Participants may withhold personal information from someone they know for fear of being judged (Shah, 2004 p569). However I found, the familiarity between us allowed a degree of established trust. Our confidence in each other's swimming ability allowed us to focus on the interview. The participants shared their experience with someone who appreciated the activity, and was engaging in it alongside them. This allowed access to an understanding that could not have been achieved in another way, such as being more honest and open about the challenges of being in the water. Had they not known I was a swimmer they might have wanted to persuade me of the benefits and enjoyments and miss out on the discomforts and struggles.

Although it was important during interviewing to maintain a phenomenological attitude, too great a focus on 'bracketing' in the interview could have resulted in a distance between us, and negatively impacted on the data collected (Dowling, 2007). I used my own experiential knowledge of swimming, and moment-to-moment experiencing during the swim-along interviews, to inform my questioning and to assist the participant in articulating their experience. As a fellow swimmer it would have been easy to agree with what they were saying, and add my own layer of reflection, so I remained alert to when my experience obscured or was privileged over theirs. There were times when I was aware of needing to attend to the aspects that the participant found important rather than underline the aspects we both shared. I had to be careful I did not assume I already knew what my participant was trying to convey, and so not probe as much as they would if I were an 'outsider' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). During the sit-down interviews, like May and Lewis (2019), I also found that my participants knowing that I was familiar to both the spaces and activity they were describing, seemed to contribute to participants being able to communicate their embodied experience.

I was concerned my 'insider' researcher status might stop me making the 'everyday strange'. The level of swimming experience required meant we were all experienced swimmers interested in taking part in a research project exploring the experience of sea swimming. Their swimming experience had also been shaped by the culture of our swimming club. Different information and viewpoints from others were not available so perhaps I assumed my own perspective to be more widespread than it is (Mercer, 2007). Overall, however, I found that being an 'insider' researcher allowed insights and understanding into the phenomena from lived experience, and through the process of reflexive awareness, that this understanding could be used to inform the development of theoretical knowledge (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

Beyond Words and with Words

The literature on sea swimming and how it promotes mental health and wellbeing can romanticise open water swimming and neglect the harshness of the environment and the challenge on the body. Cultural understandings or narratives will impact on people's beliefs about an activity and how it is likely to feel (Pink, 2011). There is therefore perhaps a

pressure to enjoy sea swimming, while neglecting the hard work, discomfort and challenge that the swim-along interviews revealed. Some aspects of open water swimming are 'silenced' or at least rarely reported by advocates of the activity. Without interviewing whilst in the process of doing, perhaps these cultural versions would have dominated our conversations whilst the less attended to experiences would have got lost. Like other go-along methods, the swim-along method offers accounts of embodied, sensory experience as 'captured in the moment' helping people to describe 'the smells, sounds and sights of the surrounding environment' (Stevenson and Farrell, 2018).

Like other mobile or sensory methods, the experience of being in place together generates memories and reflections. 'Place-triggers', spaces or therapeutic landscapes that bring pleasure with movement (Foley et al., 2019; Bell et al., 2015a) allow exploration into the embodied experience and dynamics between place and wellbeing. Shifting the focus from theories of embodiment to those of emplacement can inform how we understand the performing body (Pink, 2011). By doing research in situ, the uniqueness of our swim was evident. Although there may have been reminders, and remnants, of previous swims, and even future swims, our swim, like all other swims, was unique. Each swim is sufficiently similar to other swims as to be recognisable as the same event, but actively constituting a new place-event.

It is often argued that embodied practices are difficult to put into words but Ingold questions the idea of skill or embodied practices as being tacit or 'wordless'. Craftspeople are 'renowned for waxing lyrical about their practice' (Ingold, 2018 p160) and it was my experience that the swimmers enjoyed describing their experience of swimming and would become quite poetic whilst doing so.

Much research is challenged for not recognising the body, and embodied experience, of the researcher. A number of theorists challenge research methodologies in which the researcher's body is understood as inconsequential. They argue that when the researchers body remains absent this upholds the power and privilege of the researcher over the participants (Ellingson, 2006; Sharma et al., 2009), yielding 'deceptively tidy accounts of research' (Ellingson, 2006 p298). Bringing the body back in to research, however, is 'complex and 'messy', as it opens up many ways of seeing and many discoveries that do not

always fit into 'neat' methods of inquiry (Law, 2004). Like many other spaceplace methodologies seeking to centre embodiment, my body was a very present part of the research process (Bell et al., 2018). Whilst the camera and questions were focused on the participant, the choice of questions was in part determined by the presumed shared experience of the swim. Macpherson et al. (2016) suggest that, during mobile methods, the activity under investigation causes an increase in endorphins in the participant, resulting in an increased sense of positive wellbeing that may mask deeper feelings of anxiety that might be captured in a more traditional interview. In my experience, as interviewer I was also experiencing this change in endorphins. Changes in my voice in response to watery stimulation were evident through the interviews as I negotiated waves, got colder, was concerned about the conditions, or felt elated as I completed the swim. Although, the impact of the swirling cold water was more subtle and complex than merely a physiological response.

Housley and Smith (2010) suggest that sit-down interviews, are in fact, not that different to 'innovative methods'. I found the sit-down interviews painted both a dynamic and embodied picture (May and Lewis, 2019), and that participants were able to evoke settings that were familiar in their minds-eye and the embodied response that went with them. Moreover, we were able to refer to memories shared in our bodies of our current, previous and future swims. Although there may be more overlap than is commonly recognised in current literature there were still differences. The sensory descriptions were more detailed and the embodied descriptions were more in-the-moment during the swim-along. They offered a greater insight into how the person interacted with their environment. The sit-down interviews tended towards having a 'broader temporal range' (May and Lewis, 2019 p11) as they could 'slow things down' enabling longer narratives (Merriman, 2014). I found the traditional interview was a 'multi-sensory event and, as such, a context of emplaced knowing' (Pink, 2009 p81). No matter what kind of interview, every research encounter is invariably embodied and these interviews were still, to a degree, in situ, as we had both just completed a swim together. It would be interesting to see if there would have been a different outcome if we had both talked about swimming whilst not still enjoying the embodied memory of being in the sea.

Conclusion

In this project a swim-along interview, alongside a sit-down interview, was used to explore the experience of sea swimming (Author & Author, 2019). There were a number of technical, ethical, social, conceptual and environmental challenges in developing the swim-along interviews. Despite, or even because of these challenges, the swim-along interviews did seem to access information that would not have been gained through sit-down interviews alone. The sit-down interviews complimented the swim-along interviews with greater biographical information, as participants became more expansive without the pressures of negotiating waves or getting cold. These combined methods therefore allowed greater insights into the embodied, sensory visceral assemblage of experiences involved in sea swimming. Questions of power, trust and reciprocity in researcher and participant relations were familiar yet changed, challenging naive or taken for granted assumptions governing qualitative research method norms. While the place of the swim was important, the fact of being in the open sea added greater intensity and specificity to many of these dimensions.

This was a pilot of a novel methodology and there were a number of ways that it could be developed. Interviewing in other locations and other swimming clubs could reveal the impact of researcher and participants being less familiar with each other. We didn't watch the filmed material together, as the interviews already seemed a rich source of reflection but if we had talked through the film together this would have added another perspective as we observed rather than just experienced the embodied experience. The use of the video might have helped to 'foreground commonly overlooked non-verbal, embodied and gestural forms of communication' (Foley et al., 2019), rather than remaining focused on only verbal expressions of experience. Other questions may have highlighted other aspects of the swimming experience such as the changing relationship with one's body when swimming.

Open water swimming is gaining in popularity which this makes it worthy of investigation. Although there are challenges in undertaking a swim-along method, the insight gained by interviewing whilst alongside in the process of swimming in the water offer valuable opportunities for exploring the broader experience of swimming outdoors.

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