RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assessing Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Anthropological Research Methods: An Undergraduate Research Project

Sean Dempsey, Tom Haiworonsky, Bailey Holloway, Kyra Chambers, Shannon Hecker, Ming Draper, Julia Gallant, Jag Kang, Trevor Lamb, Marlee Stewart, and Tara L. Joly
Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Northern British Columbia

ABSTRACT
As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, there is a need to understand how the pandemic has influenced anthropological research. This paper presents the results of a research project examining these changes and the challenges anthropologists have faced in carrying out their research methods during the first eight months of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the University of Northern British Columbia in the Fall semester of 2020, undergraduate students led this project and conducted five virtual, semi-structured interviews with socio-cultural anthropologists across Canada, from a variety of career stages and with diverse research approaches. Interview participants described virtual research methods involving a heavy reliance on video conferencing and digitally available resources, benefits and challenges of remote and digital ethnography, changes to immersion and the spatial-temporal aspects of communication, and outcomes of adopting new technologies. The pandemic affected these anthropologists to varying degrees depending on the location of their field site and their career stage. Despite adaptations and challenges, interview participants also offered hopeful commentary on potential long-term changes in the discipline as the pandemic forces anthropologists to rethink the ways in which we conduct our work.

Keywords: anthropological research, fieldwork, virtual ethnography, remote methods, COVID-19, pandemic

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing pandemic of coronavirus 2 disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), poses a challenge to socio-cultural anthropologists whose research methods often require international travel and prolonged in-person contact with research participants during ethnographic fieldwork. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced anthropologists to rethink their research methods in the short- and long-term due to travel restrictions and physical distancing measures. Digital ethnography and remote research methods have been practiced for years—if not decades (Coleman 2010; Boellstorff et al. 2012; Kozinets 2015; Pink, Horst, and Postill 2015). However, the pandemic has forced many anthropologists to adopt these approaches when they may not have done so otherwise, relying on different primary materials, methods, and experiencing interruptions to their typical fieldwork cycle—what has been described elsewhere as "patchwork ethnography" (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). This research addresses these

short-term methodological shifts and discusses how pandemic-related hurdles to conducting research may affect the methodological practice of the anthropological discipline.

The authors of this paper are upper-year undergraduate students who were enrolled in the University of Northern British Columbia's ANTH 300 – Qualitative Research Methods class in Fall 2020. We conducted this research study to gain first-hand experience practicing anthropological methods and to better understand the changes and challenges anthropologists have faced throughout the first eight months of the COVID-19 pandemic that were not yet reflected in the qualitative methods textbooks typically used for our course (e.g., LeCompte and Schensul 2010). Some of these challenges may stem from the mental and emotional trauma associated with COVID-19 and the lives lost during this pandemic; however, in this paper we will be focusing on the practical challenges and changes to anthropological methods that have arisen since March of 2020. The two driving questions of this research project are: How has the pandemic affected the research of, and methods used by, anthropologists? What novel methods are arising in anthropological research in response to the pandemic? We define anthropological research as a dialogue and encounter between texts, people, places, and things. Following anthropologist Anand Pandian, anthropological research is also a "method of experience" that includes reading, writing, teaching, and fieldwork (2019, 44). As such, while we focus on changes to fieldwork more specifically, our paper also touches on each of these themes.

To approach our research questions, we conducted five virtual, semi-structured interviews on Zoom with anthropologists across Canada. We chose to recruit anthropologists from all different levels of study and research. Ultimately, five anthropologists participated in the project: Angèle Smith, Lori Barkley, Samantha Moore, Tad McIlwraith, and a fifth interviewee who wished to remain anonymous. While the sample size is small, due to the time restrictions posed by our semester-bound research project, the five anthropologists interviewed represent diverse groups in the field. While all participants primarily conduct socio-cultural anthropological research, they conduct work across topics of Indigenous rights, community-based research, practicing anthropology, medical anthropology, and heritage studies, both within and outside academia. Smith and Moore conducted their previous research abroad, in Ireland and Kenya, respectively; the other three interviewees work in a Canadian context. Furthermore, they represent different career stages, including more junior scholars, applied researchers, graduate student supervisors, and senior scholars. During the interviews, we asked participants to compare research methods they used prior to and after March 2020. We focused on any potential adaptations, including changes from face-to-face interviews and participant observation to the use of virtual interviews, digital meetings, and localized research. Moreover, we explored with participants how new techniques and adaptations may be adopted into future methodological practice. The interviews were conducted and subsequently transcribed, coded deductively, and analyzed by our class, with instructor support – all virtually.

This paper presents the results of our class research project, following the major themes that emerged from interviews. First, we briefly discuss the methods used by our research participants before the onset of public health restrictions in March 2020. Second, we detail overall impacts to anthropological methods reported by our interview participants, including the adoption of remote methods, differing means of immersion, and financial, administrative, and practical changes to anthropological practices. Third, we outline several of key challenges and setbacks of

ethnographic research experienced by our anthropologist interviewees during the pandemic. Fourth, we discuss the potential outcomes of adopting new methods and technologies, including how interview participants felt they can both benefit and limit anthropological research. Fifth, we outline interview participants' thoughts regarding how the changes to anthropological research brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic may affect research practice in the long term. And finally, we conclude with a summary of our findings with recommendations for further research.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHODS BEFORE MARCH 2020

Anthropological research has largely been characterized by ethnographic fieldwork, which often requires the researcher to travel to locations far away from home to live and interact with the people or community they study (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). However, anthropologists have been theorizing that the lines between 'field' and 'home' are not so easily drawn, and the two intersect in a variety of ways for each anthropologist (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Amit 2000; Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). All of our participants described how essential fieldwork was to their research (Anonymous 2020, Barkley 2020, McIlwraith 2020, Moore 2020, Smith 2020) and most of them travelled to visit their respective study areas in Canada and abroad. However, one of our participants, Barkley, lives in the same community where she conducts her fieldwork (Barkley 2020). Each of our participants described using multiple research methods for gathering data, including participant observation, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, participant mapping, and writing fieldnotes and papers. All of our participants shared the importance of being in the field to gain a deep understanding of the day to day lives of the people they are working with (Anonymous 2020, Barkley 2020, McIlwraith 2020, Moore 2020, Smith 2020). The most commonly used method was participant observation, which McIlwraith describes as "deep hanging out" (McIlwraith 2020, 3). He shared with us his enthusiasm for just "being around" and that "sometimes you have to ask people questions and it is good to do that in informal and formal ways" (McIlwraith 2020, 3). For him, the most important aspect of his research was being in the community to collaborate on research design. However, Smith noted that anthropology is not entirely comprised of fieldwork and research, and that the writing process is another important, but often overlooked part of the discipline (Smith 2020, Pandian 2019).

Based on our interviews, we argue spending time within the community researchers are working with has proven to be the best way to learn about the daily lives and lived experiences of participants and sustain community collaboration. Interviews and focus groups are valuable when a researcher desires answers to specific questions. However, as stated by all of our participants, the time spent with a given community also helps in shaping the research.

CHANGES TO ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHODS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

With the spread of COVID-19 forcing much of the world into various states of lockdown and isolation, many anthropologists have had to modify their existing methods in order to continue their research projects (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). As a result, our five participants reported a wide range of impacts to both their research process and the nature of the research they were conducting. While in general each participant had vastly different experiences from one another, some commonalities arose. Before the pandemic, all five relied on face-to-face methods which often necessitated international

travel (Anonymous 2020, Barkley 2020, McIlwraith 2020, Moore 2020, Smith 2020). There was agreement among researchers who lived outside their community of study that the most significant impact to research was the inability to travel to field sites or work with their research participants in-person. Of the five anthropologists interviewed, only four discussed the methods they used to continue their previous work during the pandemic. Of these, only Moore, as a graduate student in the early stages of her doctoral research, built her research methodology in response to the limitations posed by the pandemic. Barkley did not discuss how the pandemic had affected her research, in large part because her research was 'at home' in her community of residence and she could still continue by following local public health measures and forming a social 'bubble' on location (Barkley 2020). Meanwhile Smith, McIlwraith, Moore, and the anonymous anthropologist found their work heavily affected by the pandemic, despite their attempts to continue working and researching. For these anthropologists working in the academy at various universities, direct contact with those involved in their research, both participants and colleagues, had not been possible (Anonymous 2020, McIlwraith 2020, Moore 2020, Smith 2020).

The most common adaptation to the inability to interact with subjects in the field was through forms of online interviews, mostly using the video conferencing program Zoom (for a discussion of Skype interviews see, Deakin and Wakefield 2014; Seitz 2016). Four of our five participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their work, each expressing the feeling that online interviews were inferior to in-person interactions due to the loss of most non-verbal cues that an anthropologist may glean in a face-to-face scenario. Moore opined that online interviews were at worst a "band aid to get you data" and cannot properly be compared to more intensive in-person fieldwork (Moore 2020, 3). Similar sentiments were voiced by the other three anthropologists (Anonymous 2020, 4-5; Smith 2020, 8; McIlwraith 2020, 4). In contrast, McIlwraith noted that the positive side of online communication is its cost effectiveness due to lack of travel expenses. He also explained that the increasing normalization and use of video conferencing as a result of the pandemic has improved remote methods. For instance, video conferencing, he argues, is a superior means of communication to phone calls for gathering information, even if still not the same as being able to directly interact with members of a community because the interviewer can still read non-verbal cues associated with in-person interviews (McIlwraith 2020, 3-4).

Interview participants' preference for in-person interaction does not mean that they did not believe that online interviews should be removed from anthropological methods once the pandemic is over, with the anonymous participant noting that online interviews are another "tool" to add to anthropology's methodological toolbox (Anonymous 2020, 5). Indeed, some anthropologists even note how remote interviews may be better suited to certain research settings. Anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla, for instance, explains how phone interviews with survivors of disasters provided a more trauma-informed, practical approach for working with displaced individuals, and that interviewee comfort on the phone provided for richer narrative stories than in-person interviews (2020). Among our participants, Smith stated organizing online interactions with international colleagues and research participants was easier during the pandemic due to the increased interconnectivity (Smith 2020, 7). As a graduate supervisor, McIlwraith expressed appreciation for the ingenuity of many students in how they were able to enrich the data collected during digital interviews, such as through 'arts-based' methods where participants would interact as much with

drawings as with words (McIlwraith 2020, 1). The anonymous participant, however, also explained that despite its potential benefits, virtual data collection and interviews are not adaptable to all research designs. This anthropologist's methods relied on participant observation of a phenomenological nature, examining the non-verbal experiences in ritualist settings, and were ultimately unable to adjust to digital or remote methods of data collection (Anonymous 2020, 5). Working often in spaces of absolute silence, where non-verbal cues form the majority of field data, the virtual methodological toolkit currently available was not sufficient for this anthropologist's research. As such, they reported the most significant impacts resulting from distanced communication. While the other participants were forced to make use of virtual methods, and they may have expressed dissatisfaction at the inadequacies of the methods, our phenomenologically grounded researcher relayed being entirely unable to continue their research as a result (Anonymous 2020). However, participants overwhelmingly agreed that online interviews are an important part of anthropological research during this pandemic and may become a more commonly used method in the future.

Following the switch to virtual methods, interviewees most commonly reported disruptions to the research process due to the pandemic. The severity of disruptions caused by the pandemic was influenced dramatically by the stage in which the participant was in their research process when COVID-19 public health measures were first implemented. For those in the data collection stage whose fieldwork necessitated travel to the field-site, such activities have been indefinitely postponed at the time of writing. Even those anthropologists we interviewed who could receive exemptions from travel bans chose not to for the ethical risks of spreading COVID-19 to vulnerable participant populations (Anonymous 2020, Moore 2020). With international travel no longer a possibility, data collection is in limbo. Participants also reported that the costs of conducting research have increased significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the two-week quarantine period on either end of any non-local travel increases the funds and time required for travel significantly (Anonymous 2020). Moore also reported that funding agencies are unwilling to make allowances for new pandemic induced delays, reducing access to funding resources and opportunities (Moore 2020). Understandably, these delays in receiving official documentation from institutions poses a significant challenge for those researchers now experiencing increased research costs.

Despite the impacts of the pandemic on the stage of the project and research collection, it is not the only part of academic research. Smith emphasizes how she has found herself performing more of the writing portion of her work over the course of the pandemic, an aspect of the research that has been less affected by the pandemic than the research portion (Smith 2020). McIlwraith and Moore echoed similar sentiments of performing write-ups, data analysis, and grant proposals instead of the more in-person research methods that they found themselves unable to perform (McIlwraith 2020, Moore 2020).

Senior researchers and instructors reported a decrease in the time available to devote to research (Smith 2020). Smith, who also happened to be the department Chair at her university at the time, reported an almost exponential increase in the service work faculty were required to do. In fact, when asked, she reported that in addition to travel disruptions, "the time that COVID has taken away from my research is the most significant [change]" (Smith 2020, 5). With institutions also having to adapt to offering classes that comply with new COVID-19 related public health mandates, academics who fulfill an administrative role (sitting on boards and

councils), are being required to commit much more time to those tasks. Both senior and junior anthropology instructors also experienced increases in their workloads. For example, Barkley—who had recently left academia earlier than they had previously planned to avoid teaching during the pandemic—noted that their colleagues who were still teaching were struggling with the transition to online learning (Barkley 2020). This would appear to be another area of discrepancy in how this pandemic has impacted researchers at different career stages: those who did not already play an administrative or teaching role prior to this pandemic did not report that an increase in workload was an issue encountered.

That is not to say, however, that early career academics were not also uniquely impacted by pandemic changes. We were fortunate to have both a Ph.D. student, Moore (2020), and a graduate student supervisor, Mcllwraith (2020), as part of the project to provide insight into how those just starting in the discipline have found the experience. Both articulated that the effects of this pandemic on students appears to have been greater than on most fully accredited professionals. The reasoning for this appears to be due to the issue of establishment. Professionals who have been practicing anthropologists for a significant amount of time reported having already formed long-term relationships with the majority of the groups they work with (Anonymous 2020, Barkley 2020, McIlwraith 2020, Smith 2020). Yet graduate students are in the initial process of forging those relationships and are not so fortunate. Maintaining a preexisting relationship through trying times appears to be far easier, at least in respect to this pandemic, than establishing entirely new ones. As McIlwraith stated, "I think that the effects on students has probably in many ways [been] greater than [the] effects on faculty because faculty have long term relationships and, through our careers, we are able to maintain and anticipate an ongoing relationship with people into the future" (McIlwraith 2020, 2). For students and early career researchers, this is not the case.

The final component of anthropological practice that participants argued was impacted by the pandemic was academic conferences. While not an exclusive aspect of anthropology when compared to other disciplines, conferences are still a part of the discipline that shifted to adapt to the pandemic. Both McIlwraith and Moore noted how academic conferences had gone virtual rather than be in-person, and while Moore did not elaborate further, McIlwraith felt that this was actually a positive change (Moore 2020, 6; McIlwraith 2020, 2). He noted how that the digital medium combined with the increased online interconnectivity that resulted from the pandemic allowed conferences to display research and voices from those that typically would be unable to attend. McIlwraith ultimately felt that it would allow for a level of engagement and interconnectedness that would be beneficial to the discipline as a whole. McIlwraith also experienced an increased sense of interconnectedness with colleagues, explaining that he had more meetings recently than he ever had before (McIlwraith 2020, 2-3).

The anthropologists interviewed did their best to adapt to the different circumstances and unique challenges that were posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and their resulting inability to perform field research. All four of the anthropologists who discussed the methods they used during the pandemic displayed a preference for field research to online methods, but ultimately made the best they could out of their difficult situations using the methods available to them. However, there was a feeling that digital interaction and interconnectivity may become a permanent part of anthropological practice, even if it would not dethrone the importance of in-person fieldwork to the discipline.

KEY CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS

Now that we have demonstrated the overall impacts to anthropological research interview participants reported, we turn to a description of their key challenges and setbacks, both surmountable and insurmountable. Given the nature of the research many of our participants undertake working with marginalized and/or vulnerable peoples, a common challenge they reported was related to morality and ethics (see also Faubion 2009). Expressing the sentiments felt by most of those who agreed to partake in this study, Moore explained that "it's frustrating as an anthropologist to see the populations you're working with kind of struggling in that way. Which is always difficult, it is never easy, but COVID is exacerbating inequalities in ways that I think are challenging methodologically but challenging just as you know, a person who cares about the population you're working with" (Moore 2020, 5). Watching those you work with struggling to cope with the unequal impacts of this pandemic is understandably challenging. Similarly, those participants experiencing the hardships of COVID-19 are justifiably less able to commit to taking part in research. The researchers we interviewed referred to the decreased focus on research they had experienced among their own research participants several times (Moore 2020). The unique interpersonal relationship shared between the research subject(s) and the anthropologist(s), while offering the chance for incredible connections, also leaves participants susceptible to becoming far more emotionally attached than some of the less intimate sciences (Behar 1996).

Immersion in the 'field' was another aspect of anthropological research that was heavily impacted by the pandemic. Particularly for those who would normally examine lived experience, finding ways to gather the information needed to draw meaningful conclusions has been difficult. All of the participants interviewed mentioned in some form having resorted to non-traditional, yet reliable, sources of information to supplement their research. Publicly available documents such as blogs, newspapers, and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) reports were just a few of those mentioned (Moore 2020). For example, Smith used sources such as newspapers, social media, and advocacy pages to retain a sense of what was happening in her study area, but recognized these sources were not a substitute for being able to visit the study area (Smith 2020, 5). Here, immersion in the field has shifted for many of our interview participants from being an embodied endeavour, to being solely a kind of digital or remote immersion of the mind. In both accounts, the 'field' may be entered by being in relation with research participants and colleagues, which is possible both in-person and digitally.

Closely related, the issue of prearranged informants choosing to withdraw participation with little or no warning was another challenge that was even experienced by our anonymous participant's researching team (Anonymous 2020). Individuals who might normally participate in research are also subject to the uncertainties and impacts of the pandemic such as managing their own and their families' mental and physical health alongside economic/financial uncertainties. Using technology to communicate can also be stressful for some, and it appears that it has not been uncommon for individuals to be unable or unwilling to adopt virtual methods. While the reported reasoning for this varied, be it that the group the researcher wished to study has an aversion to technology, did not have access, or simply never provided a rationale, there was an increase in the frequency of withdrawal of participation (Anonymous 2020).

The precarious nature of conducting research during a pandemic was also an issue impacting several of the anthropologists

interviewed (Moore 2020, Anonymous 2020). The current situation in many regions globally is highly volatile as new COVID-19 related developments are hard to predict with any degree of certainty beyond the immediate future. As such, planning a viable research design which adequately addresses an ever-evolving pandemic situation is extremely challenging. As the anonymous interviewee reported, even being able to put together a viable plan is not a guarantee of success (Anonymous 2020). Where, normally, a degree of flexibility is to be expected in ethnographic research and one could adapt to unexpected situations as they arose, since March 2020, even a small change in circumstances can derail an entire project. By applying measures to ensure the safety of participants, the anonymous interviewee negotiated access to do their ethnographic fieldwork onsite. A condition of this physical participation was that the anonymous researcher agreed to self-isolate in a cabin away from the main settlement for two-weeks before integrating into the population and beginning their research. While they happily accepted the more than reasonable terms, on the third day after coming out of isolation, they received news of a family emergency and promptly had to leave the site to return home. Having then dealt with the issue at home, they then faced a dilemma: should they return to the field site and spend another 14 days isolating, or call the project off and wait to reschedule until the pandemic eases? Ultimately, the time and monetary costs of having to spend another two-weeks isolating before beginning work were too great, and the project was postponed indefinitely (Anonymous 2020). While this is one experience among those interviewed for this project, the fragile and easily disrupted nature of researching on-site, was a challenge shared by many.

While the researchers interviewed were able to use methods such as digital interviews to circumvent their inability to perform in-person interviews or fieldwork, there were some problems that were too great and will remain as obstacles to research for the foreseeable future. Our anonymous anthropologist described their difficulties as follows: "[Fieldwork is] a big time commitment, and actually [a big] financial commitment" (Anonymous 2020, 3). In reference to a recently cancelled trip they stated, "I was supposed to go…on March 15th [laughing], which is sort of funny now. So, I obviously didn't go" (Anonymous 2020, 3). This financial commitment is a large burden on researchers and may prove to be insurmountable for many as the pandemic continues.

The concept of relationship is itself paramount to the anthropological process and being separated from the community in which one works in any means, be it physical or otherwise, prevents the anthropologist from conducting participatory methods. McIlwraith described the separation he felt as a community-based ethnographer, "I do feel a sense of detachment. I mean I live quite a long way away from the places that I work, and you know I have quite a number of friends in some of these places that I don't get to see as much or interact with as much." (McIlwraith 2020, 5). This sense of detachment and separation from community can tear at the heart of a community-based researcher and can produce a sense of homesickness for the field (LeCompte and Schensul 2010).

For our interview participants, separation often resulted in a cancellation or delay of existing research plans. Moore described her experiences as "being put on hold" (Moore 2020, 5), an experience shared by McIlwraith as he describes a community event which itself was "put off until at least next summer" (McIlwraith 2020, 4). Highlighting the expanded effects of separation from the region of one's work, McIlwraith stated that "the big setback, now that I think about it, is the cancelling of community events where we

were going to be mobilizing people around the things we identified during the research" (McIlwraith 2020, 3). With the typical rush of summer anthropological research being disrupted, McIlwraith added that "maybe one of the benefits unforeseen [of the pandemic and cancellation of events] is that communities get a break from people like me coming and trying to hang out" (McIlwraith 2020, 1). For better or worse, the pandemic has altered the extent and means by which anthropological researchers interact with the communities they research, and many of these changes will likely persist into the foreseeable future.

BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF NEW METHODS AND TECHNOLOGIES

For most of our participants, moving and transitioning their research, methods and/or fieldwork online posed a difficult task (Anonymous 2020, McIlwraith 2020, Moore 2020, Smith 2020). Working online demanded the use of new technologies and practices with little advance notice. Many of our participants emphasized the importance of virtual ethnography during these times, as well as its benefits and shortcomings (Deakin and Wakefield 2014; Seitz 2016). Moore raised concerns about how conducting interviews in a virtual setting might affect the connection between a researcher and participant stating, "People get nervous on camera especially if they don't know you very well" (Moore 2020, 3). Yet she felt that a benefit of virtual methods was necessary in these times arguing it will allow anthropologists to "fine tune" and enhance methods she had used in her work pre-COVID-19 (Smith 2020, 7). For the anonymous participant whose work focused heavily on non-verbal interactions, virtual ethnography lacked the physical component required to get that same sense of "communal body" (Anonymous 2020, 4). Other electronic methods included the accessing of electronically published newspapers, reaching out to advocacy pages, and adapting non-virtual methods to an online space. While some of the participants expressed the possible difference between personally gathered data and virtually gathered data, they also discussed that there are ethnographic methods that are capable of being adapted to new technologies with some creativity and flexibility (Anonymous 2020, Smith 2020, McIlwraith 2020).

The pressures of the pandemic are encouraging more researchers to turn to virtual methods and for more research around virtual methodology to be done (Smith 2020). Most of our participants expressed an interest in how these virtual methods can be used in combination with other methodology, be it through adapting in-person methods to virtual environments, encouraging virtual collaboration between researchers, or an increase in hybrid conferences that mesh physical and virtual knowledge sharing. Moore stated that she thinks "there are a lot of benefits to virtual ethnography, it is something that is now gaining a lot of research around the methodology itself because of COVID" (Moore 2020, 3). McIlwraith similarly affirmed that "participating in interviews by phone or by Zoom is not entirely the end of the world, even if it wasn't what you set out to do" (McIlwraith 2020, 3). However, Moore was clear that she personally does not know if doing virtual ethnography would be an approach she would primarily adopt in the future (Moore 2020). She believes in the importance of in-person connections that are made between the researcher and their participants, and that virtual ethnography can be more challenging in terms of establishing rapport, especially if the participants are part of marginalized communities who may not have access to or comfort with technology and/or outsiders. In the context of her research, Moore stated that virtual methods are "kind of a band aid to get you data, but I don't know if the quality of the data is quite as good" (Moore 2020, 3). In response to these kinds of

arguments, Barkley expressed excitement at the potential of virtual ethnography's limitations encouraging more researchers to transition from conducting research internationally towards working locally among their own communities (Barkley 2020).

Smith noted that another advantage to conducting research virtually was that she was still able to connect with research colleagues who are located in different countries (Smith 2020). She added that this benefits her research as "it's much easier" to be able to connect with international research participants and colleagues to have a conversation reflecting on local topics of news in real time, as they happen, as opposed to when she is able to travel to see them in-person (Smith 2020, 5). Similarly, McIlwraith noted virtual communication platforms present new opportunities because a virtual platform "lends itself to a different kind of engagement...that just isn't possible if it's a face-to-face meeting" (McIlwraith 2020, 3). Research meetings and other events that focus on disseminating anthropological information have typically been generated by and for academics, yet McIlwraith noted the potential for engagement to become permanently more democratic and international by using digital technologies to better connect one another.

POTENTIAL LASTING EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 VIRUS ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Across our five participants we also found a diverse collection of forward-looking research plans that respond to the pandemic in different ways. Although the thoughts of each participant were context-dependent, there were areas of general overlap in thoughts about the future adoption of virtual methods in anthropological practice. McIlwraith explained how the COVID-19 pandemic had provided a new opportunity to have virtual conferences and reach a wider audience (McIlwraith 2020). He highlighted that virtual calls and conferences were a part of the future as they allow for people from all over the world to join in, visit, and present. Being forced to go online has opened doors to new ways of learning and connection to other parts of the world, all while staying at home. For example, the University of Guelph's Masters students had to adjust quickly to the new travel restrictions. They either had to scrap their entire thesis idea or modify it to function within the new social distancing measures. As such, many student researchers conducted interviews over Zoom, which allowed them to form connections and conduct fieldwork without travelling. Virtual research methods give opportunities to reach audiences and connect with people they may not be able to otherwise, and this benefit may allow for more flexibility in anthropological methods in the future (McIlwraith 2020).

Similarly, Barkley alluded to how research methods she used during the pandemic will be adopted into her fieldwork in the long term, as it has introduced new ways to connect with others both near and far (Barkley 2020). She added that the pandemic may influence anthropologists towards working more from home and within one's home community more often, which can help shift away from the neo-colonial tendencies of going elsewhere to conduct research. She believes that the COVID-19 pandemic could function as a transitional period—a kind of "reckoning" (Todd 2018)—for anthropologists to shift away from their colonial roots of studying the Other, and instead localize their research to home communities (Barkley 2020).

Relatedly, Smith spoke of how the pandemic may cause changes to the way anthropologists show care towards themselves, their participants, and their peers. For example, anthropologists and those with whom they work may be more attentive to when someone needs a break and step away from the computer or when it is time for a walk (Smith 2020). Smith also noted that the pandemic will

influence future research questions because the pandemic has brought to light different social structures of communities, inequalities, and relationships. The pandemic highlights how people interact and deal with challenges, for example, which will help researchers identify new research questions and topics.

Anthropologists may experience a long-term shift in research-based relationships as a result of the pandemic. Among our five participants there were mixed feelings surrounding the shift towards remote and virtual research in the long term. Some agreed that the virtual methods represented the future of fieldwork as anthropologists can reach more people without previous temporal, financial, and spatial restrictions, while others felt the connections and relationships created through in-person fieldwork produced better data. Conducting ethnographic field work relies on creating and maintaining relationships with your research subjects, which can be done virtually or in-person—with differing results.

CONCLUSION

Anthropological methods traditionally emphasize in-person community interaction, and as such finds themselves in a difficult position as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anthropologists interviewed for this project—Lori Barkley, Tad McIlwraith, Samantha Moore, Angele Smith, and an anonymous participant—all discussed how their particular research projects had been affected as a result of the pandemic. Due to the virulent nature of COVID-19, international travel and gathering were restricted across the world, posing a problem for a discipline whose research often consists of traveling across the world and gathering with community members for an extended amount of time. McIlwraith, Moore, and Smith were forced to adapt their research by adopting digital methods, in particular Zoom video interviews, to work around their physical distance from their research participants and communities. Meanwhile, Barkley was relatively unaffected by the pandemic as a result of her already performing research in her own community, while the anonymous interviewee found themself completely unable to conduct research in the current climate.

The interviewees all felt that digital interviews were inferior to more conventional, in-person fieldwork, and avoided changing their research to entirely focus on virtual methods in favour of accepting the prolonged time frames their projects would take. If the 'field' is defined as being in relation with the people, places, and things, the field may be entered remotely or in-person. As such, our research participants found other ways to remain in relation through digital media. Additionally, since not all aspects of anthropological research are reliant on fieldwork, such as grant applications, data analysis, and writing, these were all performed by interview participants when fieldwork was unavailable. Despite limitations of virtual interview methods, the interviewees did not believe that the discipline should entirely do away with digital interviews after the pandemic was over, perceiving these as yet another tool that anthropologists could use to perform research and gain data. The present issue posed by the pandemic, however, stems more from digital interviews being the only tool feasibly available for many. The digital paradigm emergent from the pandemic had other effects, such as changing how anthropological colleagues interact and how conferences occur. Participants also described the emancipatory potential of the pandemic on anthropological research, as it forces anthropologists to slow down and think through their methods more carefully—and potentially shift towards more decolonial practices (Günel et al 2020). These changes may remain as a part of anthropology past the end of this pandemic, and possibly even have beneficial impacts to the discipline as a whole going forward.

Beyond interviewing anthropologists, as we did in this study, there is also a need to understand how the pandemic is affecting participants of anthropological research, as evidenced by McIlwraith's comment about the lack of researchers in his field site this summer. This raises many questions such as: how does the pandemic affect anthropological research, not only from the perspectives of anthropologists, but from the points of view of our research collaborators, colleagues, and participants? These trends in changing anthropological practice will be worth watching and reflecting on as the pandemic continues. In all, the digital and remote paradigm adopted as a result of the pandemic by the researchers we interviewed will ultimately remain in place to some degree until in-person gatherings and international travel are relatively less restricted. Yet going forward, elements of this paradigm may remain as an integral aspect of anthropology.

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