Zoom Interviews: Benefits and Concessions

John L. Oliffe[1,2] , Mary T. Kelly[1], Gabriela Gonzalez Montaner[1], and Wellam F. Yu Ko[1]

Abstract

COVID-19 restrictions have transitioned in-person qualitative research interviews to virtual platforms. The purpose of the current article is to detail some benefits and concessions derived from our experiences of using Zoom to interview men about their intimate partner relationship breakdowns and service providers who work with men to build better relationships. Three benefits; 1) Rich therapeutic value, 2) There's no place like home, and 3) Reduced costs to extend recruitment reach and inclusivity, highlighted Zoom's salutary value, the data richness afforded by being interviewed from home, and the potential for cost-effectively progressing qualitative study designs. In particular, reduced labour and travel costs made viable wider reaching participant recruitment and multi-site data collection. The concessions; 1) Being there differently, 2) Choppy purviews and 3) Preparing and pacing, and adjusting to the self-stream revealed the need for interviewers to nimbly adjust to circumstances outside their direct control. Included were inherent challenges for adapting to diverse interviewee locations, technology limits and discordant audio-visual feeds. Amongst these concessions there was resignation that many in-person interview nuances were lost amid the virtual platform demanding unique interviewer skills to compensate some of those changes. Zoom interviews will undoubtedly continue post COVID-19 and attention should be paid to emergent ethical and operational issues.

Introduction

Interviews are the most commonly used qualitative data collection method, and much has been written about the researcher skills required to do effective interviews (Bengtsson & Fynbo 2018; Fritz & Vandermause, 2018; Pope & Mays, 2006). The versatility of interviews has also been evident in individual, dyadic and focus group formats tapping the narratives of patients, families, stakeholders and policy-makers to understand (and address) health practices, illness behaviours and service delivery (Odgen & Cornwell, 2010). The interviewer's strategies for facilitating dialogue, and efforts for integrating what is *seen* to augment participants' spoken (and transcribed) words have also been described (Nunkoosing, 2005). Ever present within these reflexive and 'how to' guides for conducting qualitative interviews have been well-intended efforts for orientating and upskilling researchers to engage participants through genuine interest and poignant open-ended questions and prompts (Green & Thorogood, 2014; Leech, 2002). Of course, these insights and tips offer a mountain of

helpful advice – nod-prompting information that has been handed down (so to speak) to build capacity and advance the interview work and worlds of qualitative researchers (McGrath et al., 2019). It is fair to say, however, that the vast majority of this work has relied on (and often argued for) the interviewer and interviewee to connect in-person to garner and gather participants' perspectives (Ezzy, 2010).

Enter the extraordinary contexts of COVID-19 – and the calls for social distancing (later re-named physical distancing) that all at once estranged countries and bordered communities in locking down billions of individuals. Unique to many

[1]School of Nursing, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
[2]Department of Nursing, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Corresponding Author:
John L. Oliffe, School of Nursing, University of British Columbia, 109 2176 Health Sciences Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 2B5. Canada.
Email: john.oliffe@ubc.ca

people's lifetimes, a spray of adjectives including unprecedented, incomparable and foreboding described COVID-19 and its masking and muting of what used to be the 'everyday'. Political and health leaders' directions to 'go home and stay close to home' echoed worldwide from middle March 2020, and within this directive everything seemed acutely dislocated – including the qualitative work of in-person interviews. Stalled, in-person interviews were pushed to virtual platforms, with the emphasis on safety (urged by research ethics boards), wherein e-interviews replaced in-person interviews as necessity (not method or study design considerations). Amid these changes, many universities purchased Zoom video conferencing licences for their academic communities, and the vernacular relentlessly promoted (and normed) Zoom as the remedy (albeit hopefully makeshift) for what we used to do in-person – including qualitative interviews (McMaster University, n.d). As the world waited (and waited) for the procurement [s] and uptake of 'life as we knew it' restoring vaccines, Zoom pivoted as the 'can't connect without it' technology (Turk, 2020).

Prior to COVID-19 and the rise of Zoom, some qualitative researchers discussed the benefits and challenges of online video conferencing platforms. For example, comparing Skype and in-person interviews, Deakin and Wakefield (2014) concluded that Skype aided rapport building and afforded greater flexibility, and cost savings. Jenner and Myers (2019) compared Skype and in-person interviews across two studies to suggest similarly rich data, in terms of participants sharing personal experiences and exceptional disclosures, was collected. Herein the authors argued that participants' private settings (via Skype or in-person) were key to collecting highly personal stories and perspectives (Jenner & Myers, 2019). A study with nurses reported that most participants preferred Zoom rather than in-person and/or telephone interviews, or other video conferencing platforms (Archibald et al., 2019). Participants contrasted Zoom benefits such as ease for establishing rapport, convenience and the user-friendly interface with challenges around technology glitches and user connectivity (Archibald et al., 2019). Employing Zoom to study experiences of participating in a parenting program, Gray et al. (2020) offered 10 operational recommendations for conducting Zoom interviews based on participant feedback. Included were suggestions to provide technical information to participants, a direct link to the meeting and a visual reminder for researchers to record the interview (Gray et al., 2020).

Adding to this emergent literature in the COVID-19 context is critically important to carefully examine the use of Zoom in qualitative research and interviews. Therefore, the purpose of the current article is to detail some benefits and concessions derived from our experiences of using Zoom to interview men about relationship breakdowns, and service providers who work with men to build better relationships. In thoughtfully considering this forced (and lingering) change,

we also discuss the potential for Zoom (and virtual interviewing more broadly) in the much anticipated post COVID-19 qualitative research worlds.

Situating Our Study and the Zoom Interviews

Our study explored men's experiences of relationship breakdowns, and service providers who work with men in the context of intimate partner relationships (Oliffe et al., 2021). We were especially interested to understand men's relationship related mental health experiences including self-management and help-seeking practices, and the services available to them. Comprising individual Zoom interviews with Australian and Canadian based men and service providers from August through December 2020, data collection coincided with the first year of COVID-19, a time when people everywhere were adjusting to ever shifting public health restrictions. While the focus of our research was not COVID-19 specific (i.e. the connections between the pandemic and men's relationship breakdowns and mental health) some participants detailed the isolating effects of the pandemic's physical distancing rules. Similarly, most service providers spoke to changes they had made to support men virtually within the sudden and ongoing absence of being able to safely offer in-person consultations.

Following ethics approval from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics committee (H20-1868) recruitment was conducted entirely online via Twitter, Facebook and email, and 76 participants were individually interviewed for the study via Zoom. Procedure wise, potential participants contacted the project manager (GGM) by email who screened for eligibility, and those who met the inclusion criteria were sent a link to input consent and demographics to a secure database hosted by Qualtrics. Following consent and demographics submission, one of four interviewers (2 Canadian based females and two males, 3 in Vancouver, B.C. and one in Toronto, ON)) arranged mutually convenient dates and times to conduct the Zoom interviews. The interviewer emailed a password protected Zoom interview invite to participants, and a $100 (CAD or AUD) e-gift card was provided to acknowledge participant contribution to the study. Ranging in age from 26–70 years-old (M = 40.87 SD = 10.59), the 76 participants comprised 47 men (29 Canadian and 18 Australian) who had experienced a relationship breakdown, and 29 service providers (16 Canadian and 13 Australian) who worked with men in the context of intimate partner relationships.

In what follows, we detail three benefits and three concessions for conducting individual interviews via Zoom. Inductively derived through author discussion, reflexive memos and the writing of the current article, the interviewers share their collective (and evolving) insights to conducting Zoom interviews as a means to guiding the work of other qualitative researchers in COVID-19 and beyond.

Benefits

Rich Therapeutic Value. There was evidence of many men drawing *rich therapeutic value* in talking about their relationship breakdowns in the Zoom interviews. While in-person qualitative research interviews have long been associated with such salutary gains, it seemed that Zoom was strongly endorsed by participants as value adding in this regard. For some men their unsolicited disclosures suggested they (often to their own surprise) felt buoyed for having talked with us. For example, a 29 year-old Canadian man reflected on the benefits afforded by talking about his relationship breakdown in the interview:

> It was great to be able to talk about it. It was cool because it kind of put it into words basically, a lot of my thoughts. I appreciate it because it was the first time I got to speak about some of the aspects of it, and these are thoughts that I already had but I was able to sort of put into words and when you hear yourself talk about it, that in itself is very cathartic.

Many men aligned the interview value to similar gains made by accessing a range of professional and peer relationship services via Zoom. A 61 year-old Canadian man who was attending online therapy sessions explained why he, and other men, preferred Zoom to in-person consultations:

> A lot of the people say that they like using Zoom for group therapy because they don't have to get up and catch a bus… they're comfortable in their own…space, so there is a feeling of comfort.

Referencing the convenience and comfort of Zoom, most men were open and willing to tell their relationship breakdown story through a digital environment. Some men perhaps expected therapeutic benefits from our dialogue, but it seemed that most participants experienced that benefit as a pleasant side-effect of talking with us on Zoom. Service providers echoed the men's sentiments and affirmed our observations, offering perspectives for why some men benefit from connecting via Zoom. A 34-year-old male Australian based service provider explained:

> A lot of the underlying issues that these guys present with is a kind of agitated-ness or a kind of anxiety or a social phobia or a kind of guardedness against other humans and I think…the benefit of internet kind of connection is that it feels safe and there is a sense of a social connection, but there's not a sense of that physicality of being in the same room together, which in some cases is exactly what the client needs to manage their anxiety or trepidation around being with others or being out of their safe space or whatever.

Herein, we perceived Zoom as capable of providing a normative digital environment for men to talk, in ways that afforded therapeutic value both in the context of being interviewed and/or accessing formal health care services.

There's No Place Like Home. Most participants interviewed from their homes, and opted to use the Zoom video function. The lockdown contexts of COVID-19 laced the adage *there's no place like home* wherein men seemed especially relaxed talking in their living rooms, kitchens and home offices – often times surrounded by personal belongings. For the most part, we sensed a naturalness, and spontaneity with participants talking frankly and freely about their experiences and feelings. Because the interviews started after the first wave of the pandemic, most participants also had experienced Zoom, and appeared comfortable with using the technology at home. Details of polyamory, betrayals, conflicts and legal proceedings abounded, to the extent that it was often challenging to punctuate and pause some participants' narratives to insert a question. The benefits of being interviewed at home were especially evident in the candid and free-flowing talk of men who had experienced a relationship breakdown, and these gains may have been amplified by the subject matter and/or isolating homebound effects of COVID-19 (starving some men of such purging opportunities elsewhere). That said, we got the sense that many men had not talked so openly in the past, and as a 33 year-old Canadian man suggested in the closing stages of his interview, there was often a sense of surprise for how much they had shared:

> I don't usually talk that much, but I think I may have gone on certain rants and may have not made complete sense on a few points but it was just an easy conversation.

In addition to these rich conversations, we could also see aspects of the men's homes (and lives). We cannot say for sure if participants were transmitting staged views, and/or a curated online self or if they joined the interview indifferent (and/or oblivious) to the visuals that we caught. Some participants paused the interview to check on children, pets or their lighting and a few men referenced household objects that we could see behind them. Zoom was unique in how it transmitted framed views and details about participants' side and background environments. Indeed, a few men walked us through their homes (via their computer or phone) to top up their coffee and/or relocate to sunny stoops, backyards or patios in continuing the conversation. Although the current study did not include formal participant observations we did discuss, amongst the research team, an array of sightings made available (intentionally or not) through the participants' video interviews.

While it is not possible to claim attribution for the participants' talk to Zoom, it was ever clear that *there is no place like home* for aiding interviewee's comforts, movement and some visual control in freely talking with us. While these benefits also routinely occur at in-person home interviews, Zoom reduced the formality of the interview and eased the burden of participants physically hosting us. Also, although it

did not happen in the current study, participants had the control to choose to turn off their video, or exit entirely with a click to cut the conversation. This too might be understood as providing participants some management over how much was seen and said.

Reduced Costs to Extend Recruitment Reach and Inclusivity. Multi-site in-person interview studies incur significant direct and indirect costs, much of which are linked to researcher travel and associated salaries, per diems and accommodation charges. The current study netted *reduced costs to extend recruitment reach and inclusivity* wherein we were able to talk with diverse participants residing in an array of locations throughout Canada and Australia. We completed data collection in 4 months with direct costs of $57,600 CAD (inclusive of participant honorariums and researcher salaries for recruitment, interviews and transcription accuracy checks; *excludes transcription, coding and data analyses labour costs). Even with efficiencies through bundling (and/or outsourcing) locale specific interviews we estimated the comparative cost of conducting in-person interviews would have been at least $200,000 CAD. The reduced costs also reflected operational efficiencies through being able to nimbly [re] schedule and complete participant interviews via Zoom (proficiencies that avoided wait times and likely reduced participant attrition). Much of these savings related to base-utility Zoom features including sending e-schedule compatible interview invites automatically adjusting for participants' time zone, the built-in recording feature (rendering obsolete battery-operated digital recording devices) and download options to save the audio-visual and/or audio version of the interview. Also negated were in-person participant expenses such as transport and/or parking fees (which historically – we have paid in addition to participant honorariums). In terms of indirect costs, working from home, the researchers absorbed some overhead costs typically charged and recouped by the university including internet access, electricity and printing. In addition, the researcher fatigue (and related costs of reduced productivity) associated with travel were waylaid by using Zoom.

Zoom cost reduction benefits also aided the feasibility for extending recruitment geographically, and the inclusivity of diverse participants. Indeed, prior to Zoom, pitching multi-site interview studies, let alone cross-country data collection, drew intense scrutiny for feasibility and value for money given the multiple recruitment chains required, and the high and rising travel costs. These concerns may have inadvertently constrained some progressive study designs by foreclosing qualitative researchers to recruit interviewees from their local areas (the majority of which reside in large metropolitan sites). Zoom instead increased our recruitment reach and inclusivity. For example, a 42-year-old man who experienced autism, advised prior to the interview discomfort with showing his face (and seeing the interviewer), and by agreement we were able to accommodate his preference for an audio only

interview. These adjustments enhanced the man's ability and willingness to participate and facilitated rapport building in the audio interview. Zoom's reach and adaptability (purposefully without video in this case) enabled us to include this man, and other participants who might otherwise have been unreachable.

Concessions

Being There Differently. Though being there in a physical sense and shared space is a staple of qualitative interviews, Zoom has meant *being there differently* for interviewers and participants. Somewhat disorientating, we were no longer able to fully plan, let alone influence exactly where the interviewee would be when they spoke with us. Two illustrative examples are offered in what follows to highlight some concessions inherent to e-interviewing participants.

The first example relates to a 54 year-old male service provider who interviewed while he was driving between meetings for his counselling work through Sydney's (Australia) central business district (downtown). As he was driving, the participant glanced downward occasionally to his dash mounted smart phone video display, amid eloquently narrating his views, albeit with the sound of traffic and his car indicators sporadically infiltrating our chat (and the interview audio). Blurring backgrounds, passing through a blackened *dropped call* tunnel (beneath Sydney harbour) and concerns that the interviewee might actually be a distracted driver (by virtue of our Zoom interview) were unanticipated – and out of our control. Perhaps most unforeseen was the brevity of the information rich interview, wherein the participant received another call during our interview, which he took before pausing ephemerally to suggest we would need to reconnect at another time to complete the interview – because he needed to continue his work call. The participant, despite being advised the interview would take an hour, had perhaps anticipated our chat as most efficiently done in his 30 minute transit between meetings. The second example related to another service provider, a 50-year-old man who used a Zoom template background – one depicting a thatched hut and jungle setting. While appreciating that background offered the participant some privacy (regards his actual location while doing the interview), the richly coloured milieu in the background seemed somewhat discordant with where he was (Toronto, Canada), and what was being spoken about (relationship services provided to men). Moreover, the participant faded in and out of the background with the rich colours infusing covering (and camouflaging) effects – to the extent that the interviewee was regularly obscured within the video. Again, these visuals were off-putting and wholly resided outside of our management.

Sharing these two examples is not intended as criticism of the participants – but rather insights that Zoom interviews can be (and often are) distracted and distracting. Being there differently as a virtual interviewer regularly nixed our plans

and the execution of longstanding strategies used to aid the flow and focus of in-person interviews. In summary, *being there differently* required concessions wherein we needed to accept and nimbly adapt to an array of unanticipated challenges in knowing that our best laid interview plans were easily (and often) undone.

Choppy Purviews. A key consideration in qualitative interviews is the purview – the range of vision, insight and/or understandings drawn from what is observed while conducting interviews. Even though participant observations were not a formal part of our research, we were keen to note participants' facial emotions (e.g. surprise, sadness) and micro-expressions (e.g. dropped jaw, pursed lips) to contextualize and augment the transcribed interviews. This proved challenging on Zoom, wherein *choppy purviews* consistently muddled what was seen and heard.

Stemming from internet connectivity issues, choppy purviews afflicted some interviews, including one with a 36 year-old male Australian service provider who was working from home, albeit with ongoing WiFi challenges:

> Interviewer: I might have lost you again.
>
> Interviewee: Sorry.
>
> Interviewer: That's okay. That's okay.
>
> Interviewee: I'm back again.
>
> Interviewer: I never know how far I've gotten whether you've got the question – go ahead.
>
> Interviewee: Yeah, sorry. Where were we up to?

Interrupted 10 times in the hour long exchange we eventually forewent the video in an effort to optimize the audio capture. While this strategy worked to some extent, it is fair to say that the staccato nature of the interview negatively impacted the flow of the conversation and ultimately the coherence of the data. The digitally encoded and decoded videos via Zoom also resulted in freezing, blurring, jerkiness and out-of-sync audio. In particular, mismatches between audio and visuals scrambled some social cues, summoning us (and the interviewee) to try and make sense of the disorder. Simultaneously, this could play havoc with our ability as interviewers to mirror and engage facial mimicry to embody and signal empathy and connection. Herein concessions and some challenges to building rapport and momentum with participants were also evident.

Camera tilts and dimly lit rooms obscured and cloaked some participants' faces in ways that might be interpreted as disinterest. Inhibited also were efforts for looking directly at each other during the interview, as was the case with a 35 year-old Canadian man who laid on his couch, repeatedly nudging his phone with his thumb (propped on a table) in an effort to see the video. When tilts and lighting issues were averted (or corrected), looking into a screen where you could see the other person (and they could see us) also drew concessions in terms of distancing and/or making eye contact. Regards distancing, the proximity of the interviewees on Zoom varied significantly ranging from up-close and intrusive, to distant and somewhat detached. There were instances when participant's face took up most of the screen, and they seemed very close, indeed much closer than would typically be the case in-person. Establishing eye contact was also challenging in that looking at the camera (typically mounted or embedded on top of the monitor) or at the interviewee on screen failed to simulate or satiate the engaging effects that flow from a reciprocated gaze.

In summary, choppy purviews were concessions that regularly resided outside our direct control. Indeed, we were reticent to ask participants to adjust their cameras, lighting or distance, and while using an Ethernet connection waylaid some of our technology issues, we were not necessarily able to extend that potential remedy to interviewees.

Preparing and Pacing, and Adjusting to the Self-Stream. The third concession related to *preparing and pacing, and adjusting to the self-stream* in Zoom interviews. In terms of preparation, we purposefully avoided using blurred or university embossed Zoom backgrounds or badged borders in an effort to reduce the formality and/or potential researcher-participant hierarchies. In conducting the interviews from our homes, however (because of the COVID-19 restrictions and being denied access to our university offices), we needed to plan the visuals transmitted to participants, including considerations of our digital selves. Herein, we wanted to share something of ourselves without over identifying beyond our role (and purpose) as the interviewer. We also had to reconcile being seen in our home environments, which were typically private locations that we had never used for in-person interviews. In addition, we experienced disruptions with parcel deliveries, fire alarm checks, gardening and neighbour noise, and the din of some shared home office spaces that routinely challenged our ability to secure a quiet environment in which to actively listen (and privately talk). These noises were never entirely muted by ear-buds and/or directional microphones.

Pacing was also challenging as an interviewer with numerous instances of crosstalk as a result of the audio quality, lag times and/or speech patterns. Indeed, the flow and spontaneity of questions could become increasingly stilted or clipped in the absence of making some adjustments. The concession here was to take pause, and wait an additional second or two to ensure a break or silence cued (and accommodated) our next question or prompt. This strategy relied heavily on taking some time to assess and sync with the lag and the participants' speech patterns to build cadence and minimize our crosstalk. Related to this pacing concession we forewent focus group interviews (which we also had ethics approval to conduct) at least in part because we anticipated additional unmanageable crosstalk challenges.

We were also struck by the strangeness of seeing ourselves when conducting interviews on Zoom while simultaneously embodying a sense of self that was alone (i.e. privately conducting an individual e-interview). This rendered visible two-selves, along with side and rear-view vision of what was around and behind us. There were some foxing moments with this – for example, you might feel your head move or nod in agreement but see that movement slightly later in the self-stream overlaying an out-of-sync live chatter. Rather than work without a self-stream (a Zoom option) we opted to take an occasional glance to avoid being distracted by our own presence while focussing on the interviewee and synchronizing our input to the dialogue.

Discussion and Conclusion

While we had not anticipated doing (or writing about doing) Zoom interviews, COVID-19 restrictions forced us to quickly decide between forgoing the current qualitative study (and research program more broadly) or adapting to a virtual platform for data collection. As the pandemic extends through its second year taking the latter option was a wise choice (at least for us) – but it is also a decision that growing numbers of career-stage diverse qualitative researchers will need to thoughtfully consider. Discussing the Zoom interview benefits and concessions in what follows is offered to guide some of those deliberations, as well as a draw attention to what might be taken forward in qualitative research post COVID-19.

The benefits of Zoom interviews described in the current article support previous reports (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020), but should be understood as beginning (and evolving) insights, as there is undoubtedly much more to be learnt (and shared) regards what works especially well in virtual interviews. That said, for us, there was a strong collective sense that connecting virtually with participants afforded them some therapeutic value – especially for the men who had experienced relationship breakdowns. Of course, this might be explained away as reflecting the topic, and many men's limited avenues for anonymously and candidly talking about such ordinarily private matters. Moreover, the catharsis availed by being interviewed about what was felt and experienced amid the isolating effects of the COVID-19 restrictions may have inflated the therapeutic value assigned by some participants. Independent of these possibilities, it is fair to say that there was compelling uptake and a normative framing amongst the participants for receiving and giving help via Zoom. This too may have influenced some participants' assertions (and expectations) about the therapeutic value of our Zoom interviews. While such benefits can occur during in-person interviews, COVID-19 has clearly accelerated online health care and help-seeking (Glazier et al., 2021), especially psychotherapy talk-based services. Indeed, many service providers spoke to their comfort with online consultations and men's ease and emergent preference for such virtual services. An important limitation in weighting these findings and our

interpretations of those results is that we did not set out to evaluate Zoom nor did we formally collect participant's perspectives about being interviewed via Zoom. That said, similar insights have been shared by others using Skype (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Jenner & Myers, 2019) and Zoom (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020) in non-COVID-19 contexts.

That many of the Zoom interviewees (men and service providers alike) spoke to us from their homes was also observed, and explicitly articulated by some participants as affording convenience and comfort – which by extension aided the richness of our conversations. As a by-product of COVID-19 restrictions, being at and/or working from home was normed. However, the expediency of interviewing virtually, rather than physically hosting us at their home, likely aided participants' availability and engagement. Indeed, many participants were willing to talk beyond the scheduled 60-minute interview, and a few men appeared somewhat repentant that the interview had drawn to a close. Our experiences support Jenner and Myers (2019) assertion regards the high quality and depth of personal information shared in technology-mediated interviews, while also underscoring Davies et al. (2020) observation that sensitive research topics can be comfortably discussed in online formats. In sum, we suggest that home environments aided the flow, candour and ultimately the richness of what was said and shared by participants. While these benefits may reflect – and be influenced by (and limited to) COVID-19 homestay and work-from-home circumstances, it was clear that being at home on Zoom aided participant's safety and control.

There were also cost saving benefits, and given predictions that post COVID-19 air travel will be high and rising and less often used (Bouwer et al., 2021) we suggest the use of virtual interviews will prevail to some extent going forward. The lower costs for Zoom interviewing also enabled us to widen our reach to secure a geographically diverse sample inclusive of some participants who may not have been able (or willing) to meet in-person. Moreover, there are significant opportunities to increase the number of participants, complete longitudinal multi time point interviews and/or explore the potential of virtual walk-along video interviews and/or participant directed observations and fieldwork. We are not advocating to increase the number of participants and/or the volume of interview data based on cost savings introduced by Zoom; rather, we suggest that qualitative study design options inclusive of Zoom interviews can efficiently progress an array of innovative qualitative methodologies and data collection methods. In essence, the feasibility of doing more with less by virtually interviewing participants across time, and/or purpose building locale specific participatory action studies has been enhanced by the widespread uptake of Zoom as well as the associated economies of scale.

Tempering these Zoom interview benefits are some important concessions. First and foremost, being there virtually is distinctly different to conducting in-person interviews, and the associated changes can invoke an array of challenges

ranging operational to epistemological. A key concession is that Zoom effectively blinds interviewers to where (and how) the participant will be when they speak with us. In effect, there is no fixed physical address and we do not know where we are going for the interview. Ultimately, we arrive and have to adapt to wherever (and how ever) the interviewee is located. Recognizing that we cannot control the interview environment, and instead need to work with a potential bevy of unforeseen circumstances is a concession that perhaps may diminish with repeated exposures.

Choppy purviews demand significant concessions, which in turn can intensify concerns about conducting virtual instead of in-person interviews. Specifically, the essence and milieus driving 'about people' research that are the centrepiece of qualitative traditions are deeply wedded to in-person interactions and conversations (Davies et al., 2020). Zoom interviews can erode these valuable opportunities for researchers to pick-up on subtle nuances including body language and facial expressions. Moreover, choppy purviews that challenge us to hear what is said and clearly see what is shown can draw into question the worth and quality of the interview – and by extension the interpretations we make of that data. The weight of these concessions can reflect specific study designs and/or researcher epistemologies – but ultimately, and all too often, these data quality issues reside outside the control and management of the interviewer. Building on this point, we doubt the utility of the current Zoom technologies to effectively host focus group interviews, and suggest individual interviews may be a relatively lighter weighted methods concession.

Concessions invariably draw some adaptive changes, and we suggest that interviewer preparation, pacing and adjustments to the self-stream might become less burdensome with exposure and experience. Of particular note, we recommend that interviewers review their audio-visual interviews to evaluate their own performance and where indicated make some adjustments to optimize their comforts. For this upskilling opportunity alone, we suggest recording and retaining the self-stream to review later as a means to further developing Zoom preparation and pacing skills.

In conclusion, we predict that qualitative Zoom interviews will be a long-term affair in qualitative research, one that continues well beyond the influences of COVID-19. Moreover, the feasibility and specificities of that union will undoubtedly demand compromise (and strategic negotiations) paying close attention to the many benefits, concessions and emergent challenges residing outside what we have chronicled in the current article. Pre-empting that continued dialogue and exchange we suggest that ethical and social catches including confidentiality, informed consent and data access, security and storage are unique and omnipresent issues for Zoom interviews (Turk, 2020; McMaster University, n.d). Though not the focus of our current article, these latter mentioned considerations will no doubt influence the use of Zoom interviews, and entwine to further delineate what counts as benefits and concessions for this qualitative work.

ORCID iD

John L. Oliffe https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9029-4003

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