Empowering Communities

Future-Making through Citizen Ethnography

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This paper proposes a way to harness the power and benefits of community-led future change through the process of "citizen ethnography". Just as "citizen science" has become a potent method for non-scientists to collect and contribute to scientific knowledge and outcomes, citizen ethnography is where non-ethnographers are trained in the tools and techniques of ethnography to research social phenomena to understand, recommend and lead their own change initiatives.

Citizen ethnography essentially flips the model of a single or small team of ethnographers and consultants working with a community, to one where groups of community members research their own challenges in order to identify their own needs, preferred futures and mechanisms for change. Importantly, this approach requires a significant 'stepping away' of the ethnographer as the research expert and move towards a role of skill-builder, coach and facilitator. This democratisation of ethnography helps to equip and empower communities with useful skills, while also reconnecting ethnography to the fundamentals of its well-established method and foundation in the ethics of representation. We provide an example of how citizen ethnography is being used to deal with youth suicide in Australia, highlighting how through engaging community members in the process and skills of ethnography they can unpack their own questions of belonging and identity, participate with eachother in the solutions to their current challenges and approach their future as engaged and empowered citizens.

Keywords: citizen, representation, community, reflexivity, collaboration, democratisation, practice, change

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the idea of 'citizen ethnography' - where ethnographic skills and methods are wholly owned by community members rather than professional ethnographers. Our aim is to contribute to timely discussions on the democratisation of applied ethnography and the role of the ethnographic practitioner, while also suggesting an approach to change that may lead to better community outcomes. We provide an example of a program currently using this approach to support a community dealing with high incidences of youth suicide.

This paper is also a catalyst for healthy discussion within the EPIC community about broadening ethnography from it's increasingly dominant commercial category, intertwined with its purpose of generating research insights, to one of employing the tools, training and perspectives of ethnography to empower others and to democratise the ethnographer's skillset. Reflections about the commercialisation of ethnography and what it has meant for the practice of ethnography in industry have been a regular and ongoing topic at EPIC over the years (for example, Nafus and Anderson, 2006; Bezaitis 2009; Cefkin 2009; Madsbjerg, 2014). With this year's theme of anticipation, and as more and more trained ethnographers seem to be expanding into roles in organisations, it is a timely occasion to propose what might be next for ethnography beyond existing roles in corporations.

We appreciate that the democratisation of the ethnographer's skillset, central to citizen ethnography, may or may not sit comfortably with some ethnographers. In fact, it is

precisely this discomfort that we aim to confront in order to tease out the complexities of our approach. We hope this paper provides a robust contribution to continuing discussions on the politics of representation and the ethics of ethnographic methodology. Indeed, questions around ethnographic method have, and will always, be questions about ethics, which can never be static; whereby the relevance and application must always be revisited and assessed in relation to specific phenomena and its effect on the lives of real people in the world.

What Is 'Citizen Ethnography'?

The politics of representation are at the heart of citizenship and at the heart of ethnography (Clifford 1986, 1988; May 1997; McDougall 2013; Ortner 2005). Therefore, we use the term "citizen ethnography" to describe a process whereby the people who belong to the community being researched are the ones responsible for generating knowledge and meaning about their lived experience, and are therefore responsible for driving change interventions for themselves. We also recognise that by engaging in the reflexive practice embedded in the ethnographic process, those citizen ethnographers will inevitably ask fundamental questions about their own citizenship; with regards to their rights, responsibilities, levels of inclusion and agency, as well as opportunities to be heard and represented on a political scale (McDougall 2013). As such, we see "citizen ethnography" as both a reflexive approach to citizenship as well as a method of engaging citizens in the conduct of their own auto-ethnography. Drawing on Appadurai (2006), we will show how the capacity to do research is also a pathway to "full citizenship". We appreciate that there is slippage in the terminology that may cause confusion to some, but we are satisfied that this slippage is acceptable when applying a phenomenological method to the collection of ethnographic data.

In a phenomenological approach, reflexivity and multiple perspectives are taken into consideration to understand the lived experience of social phenomena (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019). The process starts with identifying a phenomenon and investigating that experience as it is lived, rather than as it is conceptualized. Researchers reflect on the essential phenomenological themes that characterize the participant's experience with the phenomena, simultaneously reflecting on their own experiences (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019). Researchers capture their reflections in writing and then reflect and write again, creating continuous, iterative cycles to develop increasingly robust and nuanced analyses. It is a specific methodology of describing, interpreting, writing, editing, triangulating and validating, and it is rendered more robust when the process is democratised; when the collation, synthesis and analysis of information is co-constructed, contested and shared (Loblay et al. 2021; Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019). Throughout the analysis, researchers must maintain a strong orientation to the phenomenon under study. That strong orientation is one's embeddedness in the field (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019). Embedded implementation research, as Churruca (2019) defines it offers a range of advantages over traditional dichotomized research-practice designs, including better understanding of local context and direct feedback to improve the implementation along the way.

Citizen ethnography is therefore a potent method to empower non-ethnographers to make sense of their experiences and enact future change. By enabling citizens to reflect and

capture thick descriptions of their environment, analyse their own data and decide on a course of action for their future, we suggest that citizen ethnography can lead to successful change activities which are suited to a given context. Citizen ethnography therefore attempts to create more sustainable systems change, positive outcomes, replicable and scalable structures, greater knowledge and understanding, as well as processes that are envisioned, defined, designed, anticipated and enacted by the very people who are affected the most. Citizen ethnography transforms the method of enquiry to appreciate the dynamic nature of change and causality, creating an environment where adaptation, safe critique, evolution and supportive relationships are the norm.

We therefore situate citizen ethnography as a significant approach that valorises the lived experience in understanding complex social phenomena. We believe that, in doing ethnography, the setting of future directions and outcomes should benefit and be driven by the very people being 'researched'. We feel strongly that ethnography has plenty to offer society, and sharing it with citizens who can benefit is one way to achieve this. We also think that this is a necessary direction for our profession to not only have positive social impact but also for future professional relevance beyond being typecast in organisational settings as insight professionals and researchers of "real" people (Nafus and Anderson, 2006).

How Is It Different from Other Approaches?

To experienced researchers and tertiary trained ethnographers, the involvement of non-ethnographers in ethnographic processes is hardly a new concept. In many applied settings, forms of community engagement such as citizen assemblies, cultural probes and co-design have at their centre the ethnographer leading, making sense of and intervening on behalf of the community. In this paradigm, the "expert" ethnographer is the agent of change, whereas in the method we are proposing members of the community become the agents of change.

Citizen ethnography perhaps shares the most with existing approaches to participatory ethnography (Grace-McCaskey et al. 2019; Haynes and Tanner 2015; Hemment 2007; Kral 2012; McDougall 2013). Both are deeply concerned with global/structural inequality, and both are also attentive to the power relations inherent within the research encounter (Hemment 2007). However, whilst participatory ethnography offers the researcher a framework for engaging in collaborative research practice (Hemment 2007), citizen ethnography offers the researcher a framework for stepping away and handing over the research to the very people who seek to benefit from the study. Importantly, citizen ethnography aims to equip community members with ethnographic skills to be almost completely community-led. By democratising the skills of the researcher, citizen ethnography helps members of a community to harness the innate wisdom of a community to solve its own challenges so they can work towards realising a truly community-led future.

In fact, citizen ethnography has perhaps been emerging for some time, but under different labels. For instance at EPIC 2013, Ichikawa, Tamura and Akama shared an example of a "model of participatory social innovation" that they experimented with as part of research conducted with Japanese prefectures impacted by the Great Eastern Japanese Earthquake in 2011. The team of ethnographers encountered a situation where, after months of work, their findings and recommendations for economic recovery for the prefectures were politely regarded as "good ideas" but attempts to "*hand over*" their research and actions to the community found that "no one was willing to receive it on the other end" (2013). As a

result, the research team decided to shift to an experimental combination of participatory action research, that situated people as research partners and change agents, with transformation design to identify possible social innovations and community-led interventions. This new combination of approaches embraced both the inherent knowledge and inventiveness of communities to tackle challenges. The result was an increase in local connections and information sharing across sub-groups within the community, increased sense of local pride, new vocational pathways, intergenerational learning and new sources of income for local businesses. In their paper, Ichikawa et al (2013) concluded that the success of their experiment was the combination of approaches which focussed on the community gathering information and making sense of it, developing and utilising skills within the community enabling community-led innovation to emerge, and the potential for change to be nurtured.

We suggest that there are two important, and beneficial distinctions of citizen ethnography over other participatory approaches. Firstly, citizen ethnography has the potential to leave communities better equipped to navigate possible futures beyond a one-off, moment-in-time research project. Similar to Ichikawa et al's (2013) experimental approach, we expect citizen ethnography to increase individual and collective skills (such as self-awareness, critical thinking, data collection and analysis) and lead to healthier, more resilient communities (including greater tolerance and understanding of diverse perspectives, the establishment of new and/or deepening of existing relationships, building a source of local pride). The second benefit we suggest for equipping citizens to do their own ethnography, are increased chances of successful and suitable change to occur. This, we propose, is because the community trusts that the process and results of the research are truly grounded in the reality of the community, they are community-led and owned, not just community informed as is more often the case in traditional consultation processes. Additionally, the knowledge gained through this style of research stays in the community rather than leaving with the external researcher. This intimacy, involvement and embodiment of experience being elicited by a community member (that is, the citizen ethnographer) we think can actually compel people to contribute more honestly and authentically and to move more purposefully towards the changes needed for community betterment.

The downside to citizen ethnography is the fact that robust ethnography takes time, as does learning how to manage, process and analyse the vast amounts of information gathered. Similarly, gaining a level of self-awareness of the cultural lens through which information is gathered and interpreted also requires an investment of time. However, established processes from user-centred design and systems thinking can provide useful methodological tools to operationalise and speed up the process (Haines 2009; Hawe, Shiell, and Riley 2009; Irwin 2018; McKercher 2020). We outline how this can be done at in a later section of this paper; "Example project: Anthropology, Suicide and Citizen Ethnography".

Who Should Collect and Make Sense of Thick Data?

When attempting to understand complex sociological phenomenon, as ethnographers often are, we need to open our field of enquiry to include not just the objective and subjective forms of knowledge that can be captured through traditional means, we also need to include the shared/social and the embodied forms of knowledge (Madsbjerg 2017; Roberts 2020). Madsbjerg (2017) states that having access to all these four domains of

knowledge (objective, subjective, shared/social and embodied) are essential in the process he calls "sensemaking" (although where we talk about embodied knowledge, he talks of the sensory). This process of sensemaking is central to the way in which humans "make-sense" of the lived experience of a phenomena - parts of our experience that are not easily accessible through conscious or verbal means - the parts that are felt and known and intuited deep in our bodies – the parts that are not easily represented through statistical means alone (Roberts 2020). It is precisely because human existence and meaning is not simply understood via mental constructs (found in the domains of subjective and objective knowledge) that humans have used culture as an embodied means of sensemaking. Culture is the mechanism through which we marshal our embodied knowledge to make sense of our lived experience and existential struggles. Living is experiencing, experiencing is learning and processing, and culture is the lens we use to filter those experiences in order to make sense of them. We perform that culture and embed it in our bodies through rituals, practices, stories, symbols, relationships and interactions.

As such, embodied knowledge and "thick", ethnographic data can only be gained from direct human experience. This is why we as anthropologists spend years in the field for our PhDs, using a phenomenological approach to study an individual's lived-experience of the world. In the applied realm, we frequently try to balance "being there" and immersive activities to experience as much as clients or employers will permit based on project timeframes and budget constraints.

If the value of embodied knowledge is recognised in both academic and applied realms for its insight into a phenomena, the question arises about what is the best way to 'collect' embodied knowledge? As mentioned above, in the academic and applied sense in ethnographic engagements, this often involves the ethnographer being the instrument to collect and make sense of phenomena. Citizen ethnography aims to collect embodied knowledge another way – by equipping those already with the lived knowledge with the skills to reflect, make sense of and document the knowledge they already have about a phenomena. By having a lived experience of a culture, citizens use their bodies as the information sensing, processing, analysing and synthesising tool to become both the operator and the instrument of data collection (May 1997).

By now ethnographers reading this may be feeling uncomfortable, perhaps even asking the inevitable question: Can anyone be an ethnographic researcher? If so, then what becomes of us as professional ethnographers who have been trying so hard to establish the legitimacy of our skillset and professional expertise? Appadurai (2006) notes that research is a term given to describe the general capacity to make inquiries into things we need to know but that aren't known yet (p.167). All humans, he argues, are in fact researchers in that they systematically engage in gaining new knowledge to make decisions, especially in contemporary society. Additionally, he proposes that being able to research is in fact a special kind of human right that ultimately leads to a democratic society by equipping citizens with research capability. "Viewing research in a rights-based perspective", he argues, "is to force us to take some distance from the normal, professionalised view of research, and derive some benefit from regarding research as a much more universal, elementary and improvable capacity" (p.168). Furthermore, research enables citizens "to approach their city and their lives as objects of study, and as contexts susceptible to change" (p.175) which provides a degree of empowerment and agency over their future. Building capacity in research also builds social and cultural capabilities to plan, hope and achieve socially valuable

goals (defined as "the capacity to aspire")(p.176). Framed in this way, equipping communities with ethnographic research skills via citizen ethnography enables them to gain the capacity to make informed decisions about their future.

By supporting community members to produce and gather thick ethnographic data we can also empower them to tell their own stories in a medium with which they feel comfortable, therefore diminishing the "hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched, 'offering a feminist practice of "looking alongside" rather than "looking at" research subjects' (Kindon 2003, p.143)" (as quoted in Haynes and Tanner 2015, p.359). As Haynes recounts, in her study with young people dealing with environmental disasters in the Philippines, methods aligned with citizen ethnography, such as participatory video, enabled groups to research, document and raise awareness of risk, and use screening events to mobilise and advocate for risk reduction measures in their communities (Haynes and Tanner 2015). In particular, it demonstrated that these methods enabled a deeper and more complex level of analysis previously unavailable to professional researchers (Haynes and Tanner 2015).

The Role of the Ethnographer and Why It Matters Now?

Communicating the value of ethnographic research, and by association the value of the ethnographer, has at times been problematic as ethnography has made inroads into business contexts. During this time, the EPIC community has been a place where these challenges are raised and discussed. One of the recurring themes has been the concerns surrounding how ethnography is defined in organisations and what that means for ethnography's significance and relevance to business in the long term. For instance, Nafus and Anderson (2006) traced how ethnography became defined as research conducted in "real" environments with "real" people" to find out what's "really" happening as part of it's trajectory in organisations. While the "real framework" was a useful and successful starting point, they argue that it has become a limitation on the ethnographic 'brand' (2006). Similarly, Bezaitis (2009) noted that across roles in business strategy, marketing and product development, the association of the ethnographic researcher with "users" and "real people" remains strong. Both papers challenge us to expand to new frontiers in order to grow beyond these definitions.

Entangled with the challenges of conducting ethnography in organisations, is its close association with design thinking. Madsbjerg, in the EPIC keynote in 2014, called for ethnography to "distance itself from its partner of the last decade". While design thinking has been a "nice marriage" (2014) that has helped ethnography to find homes in organisations and demonstrate its value to organisations, Madsbjerg argues that a far better application of ethnographers skills are in providing cultural perspectives to big issues, including those in business environments. Criticisms of design thinking have also been gathering pace within the very organisational contexts that enthusiastically adopted them. In a recent Harvard Business Review article Natasha Iskander (2018) argues that design thinking is "at its core a strategy to preserve and defend the status-quo" and thus hardly an approach suited to tackling complex social issues and change. Worse still, she argues that as a method it: privileges the designer's abilities and perspectives above the people they should be serving; positions problem solving as the remit of the powerful with certain skills, and; credentials and limits genuine participation (2018). Even in more collaborative forms of

design thinking, "the designer or policy maker ultimately decides which ideas and preferences are included in the solution" (2018).

As these discussions and critiques have been building for quite some time, the need for our role as ethnographers to change and adapt has been identified, but what is perhaps less clear is how we need to move forward. We suggest that employing the tools, training and perspectives of ethnography to empower others via citizen ethnography is one avenue whereby the value of ethnography can be applied and realised beyond existing roles, associations, frameworks and limitations.

The simple fact is that, as professional ethnographers, we have all been taught to "do" ethnography by someone, in some way. Logic must then follow that it is a teachable methodology. With the appropriate resources and skills, why could it not be taught to groups who wish to ethnographically understand themselves? Moreover, as we have already stated, if this methodology has the potential to lead to better outcomes for the communities we work with, might there not be an ethical obligation to utilise it? In citizen ethnography our role shifts to skill-builders, coaches and facilitators in transferring ethnographic research knowledge and skills to citizens. We move beyond researching in order to produce outputs and "deliverables" such as research reports, journey maps, personas, blueprints, product roadmaps, service design improvements, user requirements etc., and towards facilitating ways for understanding to emerge, solutions to become known and meaningful change to occur.

When reflecting on his own field work in South India, one of the authors of this paper himself employed community members to help with data collection (Badami 2010, 2014). We are therefore highly cognisant of how community members collaborated to help make sense of the data that they themselves gathered as part of the overall research process. We therefore openly welcome the fact that ethnographers are often led and guided to their cultural understanding of a field site by their interlocutors in the field who often want to authorise their own forms of representation. After all, the people with the real resources for understanding culture are the ones with a lived experience of that culture.

As such, in our conceptualisation of citizen ethnography, we ask the question "What defines an ethnographer?" Is it an online course? A PhD? Professional practice? Lived experience? More importantly, what is the role of the ethnographer, and who has the authority to perform that role? And finally, what do we seek to gain by holding on to that title and that role? In fact, we believe that the skillset is more important than the title of ethnographer, and are more concerned with unpacking and articulating the dispositions required to collect the type of data that is relevant in complex social studies.

Employing the Tools, Training and Perspectives of Ethnography to Empower Others

How to "do" Citizen Ethnography

When dealing with the question of how to "do" citizen ethnography, it can be helpful to think about how we teach ethnography to post-graduate and masters students at university. Ethnography is arguably the most "human" of all human-centered methodologies. It therefore cannot be learned from a book or an online course. You have to do it to understand it, you have to live it to master it. Like any skill, it is an embodied disposition. By

existing in a culture, and having a lived experience of that culture, we use our bodies as the information sensing, processing, analysing and synthesising tool. We therefore become both the operator and the instrument of ethnographic data collection. So, "doing ethnography" is not just a methodological statement, it is an existential fact (May 1997).

Just as there are three main types of citizen science (contributory, collaborative and co-created) (Grace-McCaskey et al. 2019), we envisage a process of citizen ethnography that also has similar levels of engagement from community members. From this perspective, at the lowest level of engagement, "contributory" methods would utilize citizens to collect data. "Collaborative" projects, (which possibly most closely resemble current "co-design" methodologies), involve volunteers in data collection but may also enlist citizen ethnographers to participate in other aspects of the ethnographic process, including developing project goals or research questions, analysing data, or producing project reports and summaries (Grace-McCaskey et al. 2019). "Co-created" projects would involve citizens co-designing all aspects of the ethnographic process, ranging from research design to the dissemination of results. Citizen ethnography, and the role of the "ethnographer" can vary in levels, from an approach that enables the collection of large data sets, including data gathered from locations that are inaccessible to the researcher themselves due to geographical, funding or pandemic limitations, or it can extend beyond just an approach to data collection. Citizen ethnography can facilitate a deeply ethical engagement with the task of decolonising the production of knowledge and authority in the ethnographic encounter to better reflect the needs and concerns of local communities. Arguably, it could lead to more meaningful change aimed at and suited to community members.

Having said that, there already exists a range of "playbooks" that enable the functional "doing" of representative, inclusive, collaborative and ethical ethnography in community settings. Although, it is perhaps more appropriate to say that these playbooks are less about the schematic replication of "do-able" activities, and more about the nurturing of mindsets and dispositions required to engage in inclusive citizen ethnography.

However, perhaps one of the best ways to understand what is involved in a project that employs a citizen ethnography approach is with an example project. One of the authors of this paper is currently experimenting with using ethnographic framing and skill-building with a community. He is combining "Asset-Based Community Development" (Coady-International-Institute 2012) with "Trauma-Informed Inclusive Co-design" (McKercher 2020) to facilitate community-based problem solving that is ethnographic in nature. When used alongside the process of "Emerging Transition Design" (Irwin 2018) there are a range of pre-existing "activities" that can be done to facilitate varying levels of community ownership. The remainder of this article outlines the situation with this community, the process to-date (including program learnings), and how an ethnographic mindset and skills are being incorporated into the project to help the community help themselves.

Example Project: Anthropology, Suicide and Citizen Ethnography

Project context

Kiama, a small rural town in New South Wales, Australia, has experienced a disproportionately high rate of youth suicide over the past 11 years. A range of activities and initiatives are underway in Kiama, however, since COVID, this problem intensified, and in

2020, the community suffered the loss of several young people. The issue has energised a community-led coalition of organisations to understand why this is happening and what to do about it.

Why citizen ethnography

In studies of successful community-driven interventions for suicide and self-harm prevention, it is essential to use a variety of data sources (including death certificates, youth risk surveys, emergency call data, and hospital discharges) to understand the phenomena of what is known as "suicide contagion" (Hacker et al. 2008). Suicide contagion is "a process by which exposure to the suicide or suicidal behaviour of one or more persons influences others to commit or attempt suicide" (Hacker et al. 2008). Contagion is deeply social, so we need appropriate and relevant methods to understand it. We know that social, psychological and physical proximity affects contagion, and research supports the need for varied methodology and data sources – including ethnography to help to get a more nuanced picture in order to inform more effective and targeted interventions (Hacker et al. 2008). The simple truth is that getting data on the emotional and psychological state of young people who are actually at risk is almost impossible through statistical means, especially if we want to intervene before a self-harm or suicide event has occurred. Thick ethnographic data entails affording greater attention to social, economic and political factors that influence social vulnerability (Haynes and Tanner 2015).

As a team of anthropologists and public health researchers, one of whom is an embedded practitioner within the Kiama community, we are in the process of undertaking a multi-disciplinary study that goes beyond surveys and standardised approaches to suicide prevention. Through participatory engagements with young people and people working with young people (including teachers and youth workers), we want to see how ethnographic methods can be used as tools to both understand the issues facing young people in Kiama and to enable young people and other community members to develop their own solutions and strategies for change. Our aims and objectives are:

1. To describe how young people in the community understand, experience, and embody social connectivity, personal distress, and identify deficits in their community.
2. To describe the role and value of community mechanisms and event-based interventions to mobilise social connections.
3. To examine the fit between existing mechanisms for well-being education and local contextual considerations to determine whether or not those mechanisms enhance the experience of connectedness and well-being among young people.

A method of community engagement is currently being prototyped and developed that emerges from the ground-up, focusing on the lived experiences of community members, and which centres the voices of young people through a range of ethnographic techniques that address the explicit power dynamics between researcher and "participant".

The project has been in various stages during the writing of this paper. We provide an outline of some of the key steps in the project so far, starting from the very beginning.

1. Community social challenge identified

In 2020, after a series of suicides in close temporal proximity to each other, the Kiama community very quickly mobilised around the shared experience of grief, loss and social disruption. It was clear that members of the community were actively seeking answers, solutions and ways to manage this crisis. Underpinning this was a desire to "do something" to reconcile the overwhelming sense of powerless felt by many. Community members sought connection with each other to attempt to make sense of their loss and confusion.

2. Community initiates interventions for change

A number of community organisations and local action groups formed and mobilised in order to initiate interventions for change. In particular, one group, The Kiama and District Stronger Community (KDSC) formed in response to the general perception that what was lacking was good leadership and coordination of existing services. Orchestrating a coordinated community-wide response is critical for success in understanding and preventing suicide and self-harm. Community coalitions are important vehicles for mobilizing community members and exponentially expanding the reach of any efforts (Hacker et al. 2008). However, in line with Chatterjee's (2004, 2008) work on the role of civil society in the context of neo-liberal development, non-state actors within the community (with considerable social, cultural, symbolic…and economic capital) started intervening to "act like states". Chatterjee (2004, 2008) reminds us that irrespective of the intentions, these non-state actors intervene in matters once reserved for government, are wholly self-appointed and have not undergone any democratic process. It is important to reiterate that the KDSC is not the only organisation who mobilised, and what occurred was a range of community groups claiming authority, legitimacy and attempting to establish their position within the social fabric of collective community action. It is in this context that we believe that the democratisation of ethnographic practice speaks to a deeper issue surrounding the politics of engagement, the "writing of culture" in the politics of representation (Clifford 1986), and the authority of knowledge in health interventions (Lupton 1997; Mosse 2004).

It is important to state, at this point, that one of the authors is a member of the KDSC and this paper is a continuation of his own critical reflection of the methodologies used to bring about change in his community.

3. Baseline data collected through the Community Mental Health Index (cMHI)

As a result of initial meetings with the KDSC, a Town Hall meeting was held to bring the community together around finding a way forward. This event was both a symbol of solidarity and collective action. In other communities, this collaborative approach has been an important mechanism in the successful response to suicide contagion (Hacker et al. 2008). But importantly, this event also served as an opportunity to engage the community in a baseline survey.

The Community Mental Health Index (cMHI) is a quantitative survey designed by professionals within the community. It was used to identify strengths and areas of improvement to lift mental health literacy in Kiama. The cMHI measured four areas that influence mental health literacy: Improved Recognition; Reduced Stigma; Help-Seeking Behaviour; and Mental Health Promotion. The survey measured how individuals perform in these areas according to four of our most important support systems: Me; My Family; My Friends; and My Community. The intent was to use the cMHI to understand where Kiama is doing well, and what areas we need to focus on, so that we can catch mental health issues earlier, and lend necessary support to struggling individuals, their friends and family, and the community in which we all live.

The survey facilitated the development of an infographic (Figure 1) that helped to show the community that the KDSC was committed to better understanding this situation and doing something about it. Strategic analysis of the results enabled the development of four key priorities in our community response:

1. More events to reduce stigma and increase awareness of services in the area;
2. Increased local mental health support services in the community;
3. A Lighthouse Leadership training program for coaches and mentors in the community; and
4. Making sure that young people's voices are heard.

Figure 1. Slide from the presentation of the cMHI results showing the infographic created from the survey, used with permission from the KDSC.

All these activities are in line with evidence-based successful interventions to deal with an increase in suicide within a community (Ridani et al. 2016; Maskill et al. 2005; Hacker et al. 2008). What the use of quantitative, statistical data allowed was for the community to begin the process recovery and rehabilitation (towards resilience) in a way that drew from community consultation and mobilised collective action. The challenge with the survey was that it was primarily quantitative and sought to identify correlations, but could not point to any of the complex causal factors. It was also not wholly representative of the community, and in particular did not include the voice of young people. In addition, in the context of this gap in representation, the infographic has become an artefact that has the potential to hold claims to objectivity, immediately reminiscent of Tess Lea's (2008) work on health interventions in Indigenous Australia. Lea (2008) examines a culture of community development that needs to create the appearance of action. Her work shows how benevolent efforts to improve health have brought about unexpected co-dependency's and tragic failures and talks about a culture of remedialism that is "unconsciously geared towards its own reproduction" (Lea 2008: x).

The lead up of events to this moment was itself a process where community members authorised their own research, engaged in their own analysis and used it to drive action. This is a very important step in the dissolution of power dynamics between "researcher" and "participant". However, it was clear that because of the kinds of community members involved (concerned community members, many connected to the business community, who were self-appointed as leaders and representatives of this change process) new dynamics of power and contestation were emerging. We were falling into the trap of providing a corporate "culture change" strategy to a community problem, on the one hand, and reproducing a bureaucratic culture of remedialism on the other (Lea 2008). We therefore needed to interrogate the existing data and identify not only what it told us, but more importantly, what and who it left out.

4.   *"Citizen ethnography" program developed to build skills and gather "thick data"*

In following the process of how the KDSC and the Kiama Community have begun to make sense of their grief and loss, a big priority was about empowering the community in the processes and decisions that meant the most to them. Whilst community engagement is not a new thing, we hope to turn up the dial to see communities working together, and for each other, in a way that encourages each person to witness and deeply understand the lived experiences of others as part of the decision-making process. For this to work, what is needed is the development of a system that is more genuinely reflective of people, their concerns and their aspirations.

As mentioned, some of the priorities that came out of the cMHI were to: hold more events to reduce stigma and increase awareness of services in the area; to deliver a Lighthouse Leadership training program for mentors in the community; and to make sure that young people's voices are heard. All these priorities are consistent with evidence-based interventions to deal with an increase in suicide within a community (Ridani et al. 2016; Maskill et al. 2005; Hacker et al. 2008). We have leveraged these 3 priorities and are using them as opportunities in our implementation of "citizen ethnography" in Kiama.

Some of the events that were planned and have already delivered include: "brave conversations" to talk about death, suicide, grief, loss and a whole range of other factors affecting young people and parents of young people; community gatherings and festivals; a youth mental health forum; a life skills program; a change-maker program that gives young people the skills to be the drivers of their own change; mental health first aid training, and community leadership workshops. One of the key components of the program is to train and empower young people and people working with young people (including teachers, youth workers and trusted mentors) to deliver these programs whilst simultaneously taking on the role of citizen ethnographer.

Drawing from the work of Hawe et al. (2009) we are theorising these events as interventions that are situated within the complex system that is the Kiama community. As such, these events and interventions build upon each other over time, thus strengthening the relationships (or links) between the nodes within the community and enabling a social process of meaning making and communal enquiry to unfold. Conventional preventative interventions focus over simplistically on what information is delivered or what activities are done (Hawe, Shiell, and Riley 2009). By seeing these events and interventions as existing within a complex system, we hold that the relationships developed and the meanings created within these social experiences are often more important than the content being delivered. Here, the act of coming together is itself a therapeutic intervention as well as a potent symbol and method of developing community resilience. This new conceptualisation has significant implications for how interventions should be evaluated and how they could be made more effective (Hawe, Shiell, and Riley 2009). But it also has significant implications on how we might gather data from these deeply social engagements about the shared experience of existential crisis on a community level. With this new paradigm of assessing and valuing community events, we can see these interventions as not just evidence-based, but also "evidence-making" (Rhodes and Lancaster 2019). The challenge remains; how does one ethnographer, or even a team of ethnographers access and record the vast amounts of information that is generated out of these encounters? This is where citizen ethnography comes in.

The collection of thick data, through the method of citizen ethnography that we propose, employs a method of facilitation which enables the creation of user-generated ethnographic outputs. The sites for data collection range from a para-ethnography of community events, to ethnographic film as a community-generated artifact, to visual storyboards that are generated during workshops and deliverable programs. For example, members of the community create films and documentaries which are screened in a festival to bring people together to explore issues, voice concerns or simply to be creative and tell stories (Haynes and Tanner 2015; McDougall 2013). Another example is where workshop participants give insights into their lived experience through trauma-informed facilitation styles that engender trust and rapport through the establishment of emotional and psychological safety (Coady-International-Institute 2012; Haines 2009; McKercher 2020). These outputs are then reflected upon, contested, negotiated and validated through the bringing together of multiple perspectives. Our method of facilitation combines participant-observation (May 1997) with embodied facilitation techniques that are grounded in the phenomenological method. They apply principles similar to that described by Madsbjerg (2017) and Roberts (2020), and focuses on the embodiment of knowledge with specific methods to extract this knowledge from participants.

The other key component of the project is the use of the Lighthouse Leadership Training program which aims to create oblique (inter-generational) and lateral (peer-to-peer) mentoring relationships which are safe, enable robust conversation about deep existential issues, and which (by virtue of being engaged in a conversation about the topic) enable mentors to have an awareness and an understanding of the problems facing young people as well as their hopes, goals and resources. A key component of this process is that these lighthouse leaders become a conduit to gathering thick data from multiple sources whilst building relationships of trust and rapport (essential for ethnography) which can then be captured, processed, synthesised, analysed later on. It is this component of the program that provides with the opportunity to build the "gathering" of thick data into not only larger community "events" and interventions, but more importantly into the intimate relationships that are forged between individuals through the program.

5. *Community generated evidence is captured, synthesised and shared by the community, discussing 'what' works, and 'what' needs to be considered to realise the envisioned future;*

An important aspect of ethnographic methods that are informed by phenomenology and anthropology is how to balance the multiplicity of perspectives and the iterative discussion, documentation and revisiting of data to enable cultural concepts and meanings to be interrogated, unpacked and understood (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019). As citizens describe their experiences and triangulate with other citizens through story share, creative activities, reflective practice and facilitated activities, there will invariably be friction in interpretations of meanings attributed to those experiences. In Kiama, like in most communities, we were immediately confronted with the question of how to pool expertise, funding, and political will to solve complex, interlinked, social and environmental challenges (Sawin 2018) with multiple stakeholders who all had very different cultural orientations (from health, govt, education, business, youth etc). Loblay et al. (2021) assert that "friction points" will naturally emerge and "must be reflexively considered as key learning opportunities for (a) higher order analysis informed by diverse analytical perspectives and (b) more cohesive and useful interpretations of research findings" (Loblay et al. 2021: 1).

In the capturing, sharing, synthesising and cross-checking with community members, friction points and uncomfortable negotiations are necessary for ethical and analytical integrity. As we contest, interrogate and renegotiate what things mean, as we challenge the epistemological assumptions of the researcher, citizens and other stakeholders alike form a shared agreement of meaningful phenomena (Loblay et al. 2021). By explicitly drawing on the diverse perspectives in a community, citizens can help to triangulate meanings and validate data to ensure findings resonate with the participants' experiences (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019).

According to Neubauer et al. (2019), by combining this perspective with a design led systems approach to multi-stakeholder engagement, communities can deal with complex problems and communities can provide some structure to these negotiations in order to facilitate a process of meaning-making whereby citizens arrive at a shared definition of the problem. This requires that facilitators leverage collective stakeholder intelligence; provide a process for stakeholders to transcend their differences in the present by co-creating visions of a shared and desirable long-term future (visioning); and provide stakeholders and interdisciplinary teams with a palette of tools and methodologies useful in resolving wicked

problems and seeding/catalysing systems-level change (Irwin 2018). This is a necessary ingredient in the ethical practice of "writing" culture in an inclusive way that views stakeholders as interlocutors and collaborators, rather than just subjects (Clifford 1986, 1988; Ortner 2005).

It is important to note that the approach on this project to date has not explicitly been framed as "citizen ethnography", and we are at the beginning of this process and are still consulting heavily with the young people in our community. At present the community generated forms of evidence are facilitated by a professional anthropologist through the engagement programs being run as part of the Lighthouse Leadership Program. We have mapped out a sequence of programs that aim to include the young people in the process of designing and deciding on the mechanisms for capturing evidence, moving forward, however we are not at that stage just yet.

6. *Local communities are trained and empowered with the internal capabilities to facilitate community events and interventions that achieve the above aims.*

Figure 2 below is a slide from a presentation of the youth component of the Lighthouse Leadership Program. It is comprised of three stages. The Lifehacks program, which is the initial touchpoint where we facilitate an embodied and transformative workshop that elicits robust ethnographic information from participants through game play, story share, drama activities and asset based-community development processes. This serves as a catalyst for change and generates buy-in from participants. The second phase is a 10-week Changemaker program that uses a design thinking program to get young people to define the issues that are important to them and to develop their own methods of bringing about change in the community. It also serves as a weekly check in for ongoing support. These two stages of the programare are currently running. The third component is the Champions for Change program where young people are equipped with the skills to facilitate the first two programs, thereby integrating them into the methodology and allowing the professional ethnographer to step back and let the young people drive the process organically from within. The three stages of the program represent the three phases of integration from "citizen" to "citizen ethnographer". One of the major outcomes of the program is the development of emotional intelligence, which involves "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 1998)" (as quoted in Bolewski and Sandu 2021). In fact, the expected emotional intelligence outcomes additionally involve: empathy, perspective taking, stepping back to look at the bigger picture, communicating across differences to gain greater understanding, the ability to hold space for others, the ability to engage in reflective practice, and understanding social dynamics. These qualities are also essential for the conduct of ethnography informed by anthropological and phenomenological methods.
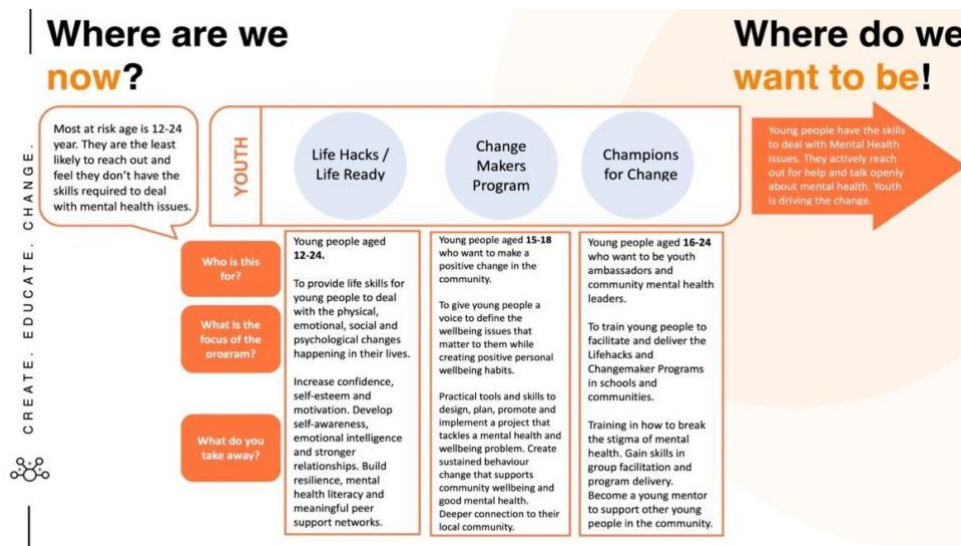
Figure 2. Slide from the presentation of the Youth component of the Lighthouse Leadership Program.

The project in Kiama has had considerable involvement of an "ethnographer" in the initial stages as the engagement and training of young people to perform the role of ethnographer for themselves takes place. However even in this instance, that ethnographer is already a citizen of the community being studied. This aspect of being a member of this community has helped to achieve considerable buy-in for this project. In particular, a level of trust and rapport has already developed based on prior work done over the past 11 years with many of the young people of Kiama. In the last few months, this professional ethnographer has been directly approached by a number of young people who want to do something about the current situation, who want their voices heard and they do not want adults co-opting the narrative.

As mentioned, the end state is that community members become the conduit to gathering thick data from multiple sources whilst building relationships of trust and rapport, which can then be captured, processed, synthesised and analysed. It is in the empowerment of community members to build relationships and gather thick, ethnographic data that we believe the true potential of citizen ethnography resides.

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes a way to harness the power and benefits of community-led future change through the process of "citizen ethnography". Just as "citizen science" has become a potent method for non-scientists to collect and contribute to scientific data collection (Grace-McCaskey et al. 2019), citizen ethnography is where "non-ethnographers" are trained in the tools and techniques of ethnography to research their own communities, understand their challenges and lead their own change initiatives. This paper explored the potential benefits and how citizen ethnography may be applied based on the experiences of the authors working in applying anthropological methods in different settings. The authors have

come together around the central idea of empowering communities with the skills associated with ethnography in order to affect suitable, favourable and effective change.

The model of citizen ethnography theorised in this paper essentially flips the familiar structure of a single or small team of ethnographers and consultants working with community members to determine a course of action, to one where groups of community members identify their own needs, futures and mechanisms for change. In its most complete and comprehensive form, citizen ethnography democratises ethnography and de-colonises knowledge production, enabling communities to listen deeply to each other, creating new connections, strengthening relationships, and supporting each other through change. Individuals gain valuable skills such as facilitation, personal reflection, communication and problem solving that can be passed down to other community members as new social challenges arise. Collectively, the community creates a compelling, achievable vision for the future, and develops the skills and capabilities to intervene in patterns of thinking, processes and ways of doing things that aren't working. Citizen ethnography therefore attempts to create more sustainable systems change, positive outcomes, replicable and scalable structures, greater knowledge and understanding, as well as processes that are envisioned, defined, designed, anticipated and enacted by the very people who are in most need of the benefits ethnographic research can reveal.

Community involvement is hardly a new idea to ethnographers. However, in this paper we aim to push perceptions about what ethnographic projects with communities could look like, and in doing so we touched on fundamental questions about the role of the ethnographer in applied settings. What might we and the communities we work with gain by sharing our knowledge and skills and supporting communities as facilitators and skill-builders? We speculated that citizen ethnography can facilitate a deeply ethical engagement with the task of decolonising the production of knowledge and authority in the ethnographic encounter. Arguably, it could lead to more successful and/or meaningful change for community members. We shared an example of a current project which is aiming to use a citizen ethnography approach to help tackle complex challenges associated with youth suicide prevention in an Australian coastal town. The project is in a relatively early phase, however, it provides an example of the types of social issues citizen ethnography could be well-suited for.

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NOTES

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