

Suicide-related behaviour among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+SB people

Webinar Transcript

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Damien Riggs (00:02):

Hi everyone, and welcome to the Queeroboree, and I'm gonna hand it over to Dameyon Bonson now. Next slide, please.

Dameyon Bonson (00:10):

Hello everybody. My name's Dameyon Bonson. I'm the founder of Black Rainbow. Welcome to Queeroboree Three, the third in our series the previous two are available on our website at blackrainbow.org.au. In addition to the MHPN's acknowledgement as a First Nations person from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the Katherine Region, and also from the Western islands in the Torres Strait. I'd like to also acknowledge Aboriginal and Strait Islanders Elders past and present, those that are joining us today, and those on the lands in which we all work and operate. Special mention to the because this is, I guess, a Queer-focused session is also to my Queer brothers and sisters and non-binary folk out there as well, to acknowledge them in their day-to-day efforts. Thank you.

Damien Riggs (01:06):

Thanks, Dameyon. Next slide, please. so, as you can see, and as you already had in the information you would've received ahead of time, this webinar is a fantastic collaboration between Black Rainbow, which is an organisation run by Dameyon Bonson, and sorry for the confusion, there's two Damien's, there's me, Damien Riggs, and Dameyon Bonson, and the MHPN. So, this is our third webinar, and we've got another one coming up in September. And this is research today that Dameyon's gonna be talking about research that was led by me, that he was part of, that's focused on suicide-related behaviour. Next slide, please. So, Dameyon's already introduced himself, but I'm sure he'll say a little bit more in a minute. I'm Damien Riggs, I'm a non-Indigenous professor in psychology at Flinders University. I'm also a psychotherapist. I'm here today on the unceded lands of the Karuna people, and I acknowledge their sovereignty as First Nations people. Dameyon, would you like to introduce yourself, please? And tell us a bit about Madi as well?

Dameyon Bonson (01:59):

Yeah. Hi everybody. I'm up here on Larrakia Country. My great-grandmother is actually from the Jawoyn people, which is just outside of Katherine. She was immortalised in the film, *We of the Never Never* as Bett-Bett, the Little Black Princess. And also, I have family that come from the Torres Strait.

(02:14):

Madi Day, they are the lead researcher on this. Macquarie University is one of our key partners. What Black Rainbow has engaged in over the years is kind of like some Queer First Nations nation-building by creating partnerships with other First Nations Queer folk in the areas of the work that needs to be undertaken. And Madi was also the lead for our COVID study, which was the subject of our first Queeroboree. And they were the lead on this bit of work as well.

Damien Riggs (02:46):

Thanks, Dameyon. So, again, you've already had this information upfront, but just to reiterate where Dameyon's gonna be talking through the findings of a project that he was involved in. And we're really gonna sort of map out, Dameyon's map out, sorry, what that looks like and what the implications are for our practice. Next slide, please.

Dameyon Bonson (03:07):

Thanks, Damien, for the introduction and the beginning of this this report really was born out of the anecdotal and lived experience of First Nations Queer folk. There has been a porosity of research and data into our lives across all the domains that affect all Australians. And what we had known and picked up on as First Nations Queer folk is that discrimination and violence that targets us as Aboriginal and LGBTI people have a significant impact on our employment opportunities, our access to healthcare, the types of healthcare that we need, housing, and even just participating in our own communities, whether that is First Nations communities, LGBTI communities, but also in the broader Australian community. And what we've found as well, and what we've experienced is that violence, that discrimination, that marginalisation has also excluded a lot of us from community, which also means a separation from country and culture, which is a significant risk for us as first Nations people around our social, cultural and emotional wellbeing.

(04:17):

The two significant, I guess take homes from this were recommendations that for us as a population that's the Aboriginal, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual, non-binary, Sistergirl and Brotherboy populations as a priority group around research and policy and programmes to address and to identify some of those challenges that we have in the face of this violence. And we are also as a population group, but we are empowered and resourced to be able to provide the responses where, they can be First Nations, LGBTQI-led. Just a thing on the initialism, those letters that you'll see, they will, they're gonna be interchangeable throughout the presentation. This language, all these initials, these letters they're quite fluid. And different organisations and entities use different sequencing, but they all mean the same thing. Next slide, please.

(05:18):

Historically, when demographic deep data has been collected and statistics for First Nations people, they've been limited to a binary of either being male or female or as men or woman. What that has done is that has

obstructed any of the data and research to really unpack and uncover what is the suicide-related behaviour that is related to those of us that don't identify under that binary structure of identification. And the gender diversity also then does not get picked up in any kind of enquiry or inquest particularly around suicide and self-harming. Next slide, please.

(06:08):

It's only just recently that policy regarding the health and well-being of our community has kind of materialised. slowly we've been working towards growing a critical mass of data and kind of footnotes in reports. I think one of the earliest ones outside of HIV was in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Suicide Prevention Evaluation project. We are slowly, we've been since that was in 2016, so it's been a, it's been a minute. We are seeing ourselves in other reports now, but where we're at is that without the data, there cannot be any, what's the word here? Activation of that note. So, while the higher risk has been noted in these reports, there's no data to support that. Therefore, there is nothing there to be able to create a policy around what interventions need to go next. This is really important in terms of the risk factors that we do face in our lives around strengthening services to be able to better engage with us as a community, but also first and foremost, identify that as a population group, we should be using your services because of the significant high risk across a number of social domains that affect our lives.

Damien Riggs (07:29):

So, Dameyon, I'm really interested, Dameyon, before we move on, actually, it's, you know, eight years since you made that submission. Where are things going? Where do you think they should be going?

Dameyon Bonson (07:39):

I honestly believe that we do need a First Nations LGBTQI health strategy in place. the Commonwealth has an announced 10-year investment, a 10-year plan, and an investment in a 10-year plan for the LGBTI community. I understand that a new social-emotional being framework for the First Nations community population is also about to get announced or is the in start of development. What happens is that currently, or to date, we don't really get a look in at both. So, there's either LGBTI work that gets done, that doesn't include us in any substantive way. And same with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work as well. I firmly believe that we need to have a starting point and that starting point is to be a First Nations LGBTQI strategy to actually supplement and to complement those two larger strategies. Without that body of work, I fear that it will be the, the status quo will remain, and we'll be continuing to be overlooked as a population group of high need.

Damien Riggs (08:49):

Thanks.

Dameyon Bonson (08:55):

Over the next few slides, will be some of the real key points that were brought out from the report in particular as First Nations people, First Nations LGBTQI people through the research to date, and this is only in the last three or four years, it's recognised that we have higher rates of mental health problems than non-LGBTQI First Nations people. So that's Indigenous people who aren't LGBTQI, and then also non-Indigenous LGBTQI people as well. This all goes hand in hand with higher levels of discrimination, violence, and abuse because we can experience it both as racist abuse, excuse me, also as some homophobic, biphobic, transphobic type of violence as well.

(09:49):

This then also has a flow-on effect where housing security becomes an issue. We have, we are noted coming out through the research that there is a high risk for homelessness, but also for experiencing poverty. and that's just not just around housing and security, that's around employment opportunities and having an income coming in as well. We, it's noted in several studies now that have come out in the last three years that Aboriginal and Torres Strait +SB people are less likely to use mental health services. Largely that's because from the outside looking in, they don't say, you are welcome here. And I think that's a significant step for services to do is to, to create a space that, from the outside looking in says, you are welcome here, come through these doors.

(10:36):

And what we, what's I think about to come out in some data. We do have some, preliminary stuff through this research and also through the COVID study that as a population group, and this is in line with the United States American Indian and Alaskan Native data that we are more likely to attempt suicide as a population group than any population group in the country. So, in the US, American natives, so American Indians and Alaskan native people as LGBTQI people are the highest risk group and the highest more likely to attempt suicide than any other American. and that's, that's, that's what we're mirroring here in Australia. next slide, please. Despite the, you know, the trauma and the marginalisation and, and discrimination that we experience, this report also brings out how important the connection to community and culture as a protective factor comes into play, and this is where family is really important. We know in the LGBTI data that comes out that family is one of, an acceptance by family, is one of the greatest protective factors for self-harming and suicide for LGBTQI folk, that is also the same for First Nations LGBTI people, one, that family is also a buffer that an acceptance of our diverse sex, sexuality and gender diversity, acceptance of that also provides a barrier to racism through our families as well. So, without that acceptance and without the family around us, not only just you know, accept us as Queer folk, but to protect us from that homophobia, that family also provides a barrier for us from, for protection against racism as well. So once that, if a family unit isn't there for us, we are left kind of unshielded from both racism and homophobia.

(12:42):

Next slide, please. We, because of, I guess the societal levels of racism and homophobia, we have to navigate those on a daily basis not just in service access, but it is imperative when it comes to accessing services that these services, as I mentioned a couple of slides ago, from the outside looking in saying, you are welcome through these front doors, our service is for you. I remember when I was a teenager, a gay guy when I was about 18 or 19, I was living in Western Australia. And I remember for the first time seeing a bookshop, this is going back to the late eighties, early nineties, seeing a bookstore with the rainbow flag on it. And I'm a bit of a nerd, and I thought I knew was seeing that flag on the window. There are gonna be books in that bookstore about me. It's something as simple as that. So that flag, that icon got me through that front door, and that's something really simple that, you know, to increase and, and to provide a sense of trust in a service just to even get through that front door is something simple as a bit of iconography or just a messaging to say that First Nations Queer folk, you are welcome here.

Damien Riggs (14:06):

And I think that you know, Dameyon, this is a wonderful part about this report, is that it does that work of highlighting the discrimination and marginalisation, but also the resiliency. I think too often, you know, and, and Tuck wrote that fantastic paper almost 15 years ago saying, you know, research on Indigenous communities is so often damaged centred when it's created by researchers who are not themselves Indigenous. But when we have research created by Indigenous people, and in this case Indigenous LGBTQIA plus people, you know,

really it does that important work of looking at marginalisation, but also saying, hey, we're also agentic, we're resilient, we have strength, we achieve things in the face of this discrimination.

Dameyon Bonson (14:47):

Look. Absolutely. And it's one of the things for Black Rainbow for us, is that we won't want to present ourselves as a group that is constantly on the end of homophobia or racism. And that's our life. Even though that's, that is, you know, often the reality for us, but in presenting that outwardly I always thought, well, what does it, what does that look like for us? How will people then perceive who we are? If we constantly present ourselves as a marginalised, as a discriminated against group. Where are they going to be able to see our agency, to see how empowered we are and to see our resilience in the face of all this? And so, we don't use it. We, we very rarely do we have that across our social media or anything publicly facing, because I don't want people to look at us and go, oh, look at the poor struggling gay Aboriginal people. because I don't think anything grows there of any substance. and yeah, so this agency is really important and that's kind of a throughout all our reports that we co-author and participate in, it's something that we, we ask that this has to be part of it, not just a deficit focus of like, here's some people that need fixing. No, we want to, we're to the point where we've got solutions as well. in terms of this work, cause it's, this is First Nations Queer led work as well. The reporting that's come out in the last few years and the research has all been led by First Nations Queer folk because no one actually has dived into the data before.

Damien Riggs (16:18):

Thanks, Dameyon. Next slide, please.

Dameyon Bonson (16:26):

Look, these kind of really go without saying for us. again, you know, these can happen at the same time, or they can happen at different times. there was some research that was part of the Queeroboree just before this one led by Professor Braden Hill. And what they found was that as First Nations LGBTQI people, sometimes we actually don't feel comfortable or accepted in the First Nations community or the LGBTQI community. So, we are creating our own sort of community within itself. However, belonging to those groups and, and being part of those groups also provides really strong social support networks for ourselves. because it's not always that within the LGBTQI community spaces that there's going to be an understanding of who we are as First Nations people, but also in the First Nations community, there's not always an understanding of who we are as LGBTQI people. So, we are still on this I guess educational pathway around who we are and where we fit within that.

I've just got popped up a question here that's come through. Is there a difference in the statistics around this work with First Nations LGBTQI people and also First Nations SB. Now, SB is Sistergirl and Brotherboy, which is essentially trans, trans people can also be non-binary. Therefore, Aboriginal trans people don't need to identify as either Sistergirl or Brotherboy. So, looking at the letters in front of you for the trans community so that includes Sistergirl and Brotherboys and non-binary, what we are finding is that the risk is significantly higher, but that that's also mirrored in non-Indigenous communities. When you non-Indigenous LGBTI communities as well with trans populations, we are probably seen in, in a hierarchy as the highest risk. I think that it's safe to say that the trans community First Nations people is one of probably the highest population groups at risk for a whole, not just suicide and self-harm, but a whole raft of social issues as well that impact on their lives.

Damien Riggs (18:43):

Thanks, Dameyon. And can I remind people any questions you have, just pop them in the Q and A rather than the chat, 'cos then it's easier for us to monitor as we go along. Is that next slide now, Dameyon?

Dameyon Bonson (18:57):

We just did Protective Factors.

Damien Riggs (19:00):

Yeah, so next slide, please.

Dameyon Bonson (19:02):

Look, these recommendations are all throughout the report themselves, so you'll be able to get these, and you know, download them as well afterwards as per the slides. But there are some real practical ways as service providers or as departments. Again, some of this, I'm not sure what agencies or departments or organisations are on the webinar today. But throughout the report and in those recommendations, there are some opportunities for both policymakers within government departments, but also those working organisations and those just wanting to do some practical work as well. I think probably the significant thing is, is engage with the training that's available, stuff like Queeroboree. We are quite fortunate to have such a great fantastic relationship with MHPN for this series and we offer it for free so that more people can engage. and also, that we found that our attending conferences was actually becoming really restrictive for people. So, you know, coming off the back of a COVID world where everyone was equipped with doing virtual engagement this was just really a natural step for us. And we had over 2000 people register for this one. so, it shows for us that when people want the information and, and that you know, we, it gives us confidence to keep going. So, engaging with the training, see what's available around, there's very limited, and I think we'll talk about this later on, but there is very limited First Nations LGBTQI specific training that's around. But there's some stuff that you can do on your own. you know, it's around using inclusive language ensuring that your facilities are accessible to all.

(20:52):

And that is, again, from the outside looking in. If you are, you are outside your organisation and look at, look at us from across the street and go, if you're a First Nations LGBTQI person, would you walk through that front door and ask if they, if you say no, why wouldn't you? Don't just grab somebody off the street, but if you do know a First Nations peer person engage with them and ask them, hey, or even create an advisory group for your organisation as well to support your better, your, your service to get a lot stronger in that service delivery. This too would then assist with understanding, particularly the localised context, around some culturally competent care that your cohort, I guess your, the population that you're serving has access to collaborate and see what other organisations are doing the work.

(21:42):

If you're a, I guess a mainstream organisation, so you're not an LGBTI specific and you are not an Aboriginal specific organisation, draw on those resources around you. If you're an Aboriginal organisation, start conversations with the LGBTI organisations in your area and just ask them what are some of the things that they can, you can do, and they may be able to support you as well. It's NAIDOC week this week if you're, you know, with your celebrations, if you haven't done so. Also, include Queer as First Nations LGBTI people within the work that you do. We've got a couple of other sessions this week. We're meeting with Woolworths and also with the New South Wales Legislative Council as part of their NAIDOC work. We do a lot of in-house stuff educating organisations and corporate entities around what we do and also the work that they could potentially do within their organisations or space as well. I think also the most significant thing is to be open to change be open to change come with an open heart and an open mind to this work and be also okay and forgiving of

yourself for mistakes. We all make mistakes and not to be fearful of this work. I think that's kind of me for that bit.

Damien Riggs (23:03):

Thanks, Dameyon. Oh, so we had already put the next slide up. So, we would really like to encourage you if you're interested to scan the barcode on the screen and register your interest in joining at MHPN Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander network. And as we spoke about before the webinar started, we're very keen for that to be an inclusive one that focuses on, so we don't have, as Dameyon said before, a separate LGBT one and a separate Aboriginal one, we want all this work to be done together. So, if you're interested in getting on board and doing that work together with other people in your area, then please scan the barcode and, and get involved through MHPN. Next slide, please. So now we've gone through fairly quickly the report and obviously, we like to do it that way.

(23:51):

We've done it in the other Queeroboree, is not spend too much time on the report. Just give you a sort of a flavour of it cuz obviously, you have access to the report to read and now spend some time answering some questions, some that we received ahead of time and some that are coming in live as we speak. So, I'd like to go to the next slide please and ask Dameyon some questions that came in beforehand. So, the first one of these questions that we'd like to think about is how can practitioners help families have conversations about acceptance?

Dameyon Bonson (24:27):

I think to start the conversation in a perfect world would be to bring those elements into, I guess the family unit to create a safe space for those conversations to have. So that's not so direct. it could be something like when Mardi Gras on is actually making a point to sit down and actually watch Mardi Gras and not make a big deal about it with that particular person. Making comments, you know, commentary about LGBTQI stuff within, within the home. I think then that actually lays a foundation for any other conversation and provides that safer environment as well for that person to feel comfortable. Look, families, I think, are in intrinsically, inherently already safe spaces. What happens is that sometimes that parents are unaware that potentially one of their children could be LGBTQI and therefore language that gets used within their house can come across as being quite discriminatory and also quite hateful that there will place a barrier in terms of your family or your young people, your children feeling comfortable and accepted.

Damien Riggs (25:46):

Thanks, Dameyon. And further to that, can we go to the next slide, please? Cuz there are some great resources that Jamie was also gonna share with people today around this area of supporting families and supporting young people in families.

Dameyon Bonson (25:58):

This here Black Rainbow's been fortunate enough to create a network of support and the Village is a programme that comes out of a Queer space in Melbourne. An interesting story you would've seen on the previous slide, and we'll talk about that merch later, that's some of the Black Rainbow Merch. But the Safer Spaces is a workshop that I developed about seven years ago. I rebadged it recently underfunding from the NT PHN as Safer Spaces, but I delivered that training to Queer Space. And the biggest learning curve for me was that I shouldn't really attempt to educate services that their businesses LGBTQI work around LGBTQI stuff because

I was schooled. But what came out of that was a really great relationship and understanding of what Queer Space do. This is one of their programmes, it's a programme that supports not only gendered parents or gender diverse or gender non-conforming children. It's also for Queer parents or heterosexual children as well. So, it actually provides that space of how to be a parent as Queer parents or parents of Queer children. next slide.

Damien Riggs (27:07):

No, we're still on the, we're still on question time <laugh>. Sorry. So, we might go back actually to the slide with the resources from Dameyon. Thanks. Just so people can see them while we're talking. So, someone's asked a question their Internet's dropped in and now are they gonna be able to watch this later on? Absolutely. You have access to the recording later on. Someone's also asked a question, does the research indicate any differences between experiences of Queer Mob in remote versus urban areas?

Dameyon Bonson (27:34):

I think yes, and I think it's all about context. different communities in terms of, I guess in terms of their acceptance, they're going to vary. And I would suggest that it's, it's largely got to do with how much Christianity is still prevalent within that community and the teachings of Christianity. There are, I haven't been to every community in the country, but there are several within the Northern Territory where you hear about this acceptance, particularly of trans members. But then you hear of where there, there isn't that acceptance. And largely this comes down to education. I did some workshops in Far North Queensland about eight years ago, seven, eight years ago. And I put up the pride flag. This was for an Aboriginal organisation with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the room.

(28:25):

They'd never seen the Pride flag before. And that was a real wake-up call for me is like what we have access to in urban centres is not necessarily what everyone has access to in regional, remote areas. So, we need to be able to take this work out to them to share with them and yes, increase their literacy around this type of and understanding around what is this LGBTQTI. Now on your screen, you'll see two of the things that Black Rainbow does. And then also I work for myself independently of Black Rainbow, which is the training that I deliver. But with Black Rainbow, we finally finessed a suite of products that we will be going live on our website in the next couple of months. We are just looking for a distributor and a place to distribute this.

(29:11):

But what we've created is a guidebook, which really just is an explanatory explanation of those letters that everybody sees and can get quite confused by. It talks about the importance of pronouns including what is cis gender. It has a page on, you know, gender-affirming care, what it is and the need for it. Plus, also a bit more detail about The Village. We also created some items that can come within the home, and so that's why it was for me living here in the Northern Territory. And when we are out barbecuing, I think the number one commodity is a tea towel. So, I thought, how great would it be to have a tea towel with the explanations of what is the LGBTQTI and to go hand in hand that there's actually a fridge magnet as well, which has those letters on there.

(30:01):

So, at home that can go into your fridge, people will see those letters and go ask, what do they mean? There's a tea towel nearby that can explain that. We've also done some playing cards and these you know, for, for snap memory and fish, there's a barcode on the back for those that take to the instructions, plus we'd have some badges and also a tote bag. So, we've just slowly been doing some really informal community-based market

research around how this is accepted, it's very much so. now we're just under the pump to ensure that we can have somewhere to distribute it. The Safer Spaces workshop is the workshop that I've been running now for about seven years. this here is organisational training, and workforce development. Currently, I'm doing it within the Northern Territory contracted under the Northern Territory Primary Health Network. it's only available at this stage in person, not online. But this training as well just is, is that workforce development, is that organisational training around what, why do you need to be doing this training? Why do you need to be aware of First Nations Queer people in your, I guess in your environment and why they need to be accessing your services and some tips on how to do that.

Damien Riggs (31:17):

Thanks, Dameyon. questions come in on the chat asking about resources in New South Wales separate from ACON. There's not, not really a lot of resources available for supporting Queer Mob. So, what are some resources you might suggest in that space?

Dameyon Bonson (31:36):

Hopefully, once we get our stuff above, because we are, we are unfunded as well. we're underwaged or unfunded and part of our business model is to create merchandise for people to that pay for it. so that's individuals and organisations. And so that money then goes back into resourcing us to be able to do the work that needs to be done. We, we believe, and so we do have a, we have some real generic stuff at the moment that you can download, and I think that's just the calendar for the year and that just adds to the visibility. but we will be put hopefully within the next two months, once we find a distributor, and have these resources available. These will also be extended towards, if you can see these, we've done our cards with our characters on them and also the definition on the back.

(32:25):

So, this is Ricky I'm just gonna go over here. This is Ricky and on the back is a definition of intersex. We have Joyce, theirs is asexual and non-binary. So, we'll have all these as well available. And what we're looking at doing is packaging these as a set for organisations to have in their waiting room so that folks can see them. We, we'd be very specific in on the, the colours that we choose, the, the font, the imagery is all come, really has come from, you know, what's gonna catch people's eyes. But we are looking to have those available to buy as packs as information resources, particularly for I think Aboriginal organisations. There hasn't been a lot of this type of conversation outside of ACON, which has been, is historically an AIDS organisation or HIV organisation. And so that they're not as, as equipped with this type of stuff, whereas as in tune to what First Nations people need.

Damien Riggs (33:25):

Thanks, Dameyon. So, another question that we had ahead of time was what engagement techniques best create safety and connection when you first engage with a client who is LGBTQ and First Nations?

Dameyon Bonson (33:41):

Be respectful, <laugh>, be respectful. I think one of the things, I think the biggest thing is to not have, to be fearful of your engagement. Treat them as you would treat really anybody else. And I say that in terms of honouring who they are, honouring who they are as a First Nations person honouring who they are as an LGBTQI person. And some of it does come down to you know, just be really mindful of any potential accidental racism or homophobia or transphobia. And that comes down to education, you know, understanding how it is

best to you know, to not behave in a racist manner, but also not to make assumptions. We are quite a diverse group as First Nations people. not all of us. We will have varying degrees I guess, of cultural connection.

(34:27):

And when I say cultural connection, this is in regard to the day-to-day activities. Like for myself I don't speak language and I don't live on Country. So, my connection to some of the behaviours that may be for someone who's regional and more remote will be different. So, it's just to really be mindful, I think particularly as therapists is how we would normally, I have a social work background and how you would normally engage with a client is have an understanding of who they are and then be able to progress around your engagement with them. But I think, you know, for the most part, we are human beings like everybody else with the same needs, desires, and wants. don't be fearful of this. all your First Nations, LGBTQI that we from some other planet and therefore it's going to be super challenging.

Damien Riggs (35:20):

Thanks. I, we've had a few different questions come in. I think there's still a little bit of uncertainty or lack of clarity about why we talk about Sistergirls and Brotherboys distinct from the T as trans within LGBTIQ. Would you like to talk a little bit more about that sort of historical and cultural meaning of Sistergirls and Brotherboys?

Dameyon Bonson (35:41):

Yeah, the look for where we've landed as Black Rainbow through talking with our community members. I'm based here in the Northern Territory. some of our leadership group is in New South Wales, in Queensland where we came to and we've got I think on our website even what we use on our tea towel when we describe or define Sistergirl and Brotherboy, it's socially and culturally accepted language to define or to describe a transgender Aboriginal person, if that's how they describe. Not all trans people, trans-Aboriginal people, and even trans people identify under the binary of man or woman. Some of them do define as non-binary. but the separation from that is the language that's used in community in regard to who they are as a, as a key, more as an identifier, I guess, outside of simply being trans or being gay. And but also it carries with it outside of those communities within I guess a more of an inherent understanding that they, they do come with that dual identity of being First Nations as well as well as trans.

Damien Riggs (36:53):

Thanks, Dameyon. And I think, you know, we've had a few questions that came in earlier before the webinar today about suicidality. And I think, you know, given the topic of today's webinar, it's really important to talk a bit more about that. And obviously, that's your background as a suicidologist. Just think or unpack a bit more about what does suicidality look like within Queer First Nations communities and perhaps compared to non-First Nations Queer communities, and what does that mean for the clinical work that people are doing?

Dameyon Bonson (37:24):

Just wanna ask you, in terms of suicidality, do you mean in terms of what are the, the warning signs or

Damien Riggs (37:31):

I think people interested in the whole picture, the warning signs, how does it, what are the responses that you might take and if someone presenting with suicide ideation or self-harm,

Dameyon Bonson (37:41):

I think in the first instance that if somebody is presenting that way, it's providing them free from harm from themselves and also from others and that you'll be able to facilitate that within your own environments, how you've done for somebody else. The behaviours are largely the same. The reasons behind it, the behaviours are nuanced and different, but they do manifest in a lot of similar ways. So, it is what you would see in a First Nations person or even in a non-First Nations or an LGBTI, non-LGBTI, the suicide-related behaviours are quite similar. Within, we had the research doesn't, hasn't yet gone into the level of out in remote communities, How does that look like for First Nations Queer folk? but the disassociation or disconnecting the isolation, you know, there is one of the things that through my research or through my studies during the Master of Suicidology is that there is, there is like, there is an unknown quantum of risk factors that exist. It's the key thing around understanding about risk factors is more about how they interact with a person at a particular time when they're in distress. When you look at suicide risk factors losing your job is a risk factor for suicide. So, is it, for me, I think okay then in the practical sense, does that mean that people should never be fired because that becomes a risk factor? So, it is really understanding what's going on for that person at that moment. Be aware though, like as a First Nations LGBTI people, some of those triggers and those, yeah, what triggers for that behaviour or those thinking could come be experienced as a First Nations person or they could be being experienced as an LGBTI person or as someone who is experiencing both.

Damien Riggs (39:40):

And I think related to that, I think people would like to hear a bit more about, and obviously, you are one person speaking, you can't speak for all First Nations people, but how do communities respond? How has suicidality been thought about within impersonation communities, particularly with regard to Queer Mob?

Dameyon Bonson (39:58):

There are over 240 communities. Yeah, <laugh> 240 discrete. What I'm finding, I've moved back home to the Northern Territory. I grew up here and it's a different landscape to when I grew up. I left this town because I didn't feel accepted. and I thought this is this Outback town is not somewhere where I wanna, where I wanna, where I can be Queer with any kind of degree of safety. It comes down to education. The more, the greater the education in these, in these communities, the greater levels of acceptance. and that just makes perfect, that makes perfect sense. So, it is around getting this information out there. I'm quite fortunate when I started working for myself nearly a decade ago I ensured that and having worked in regional remote areas for quite a while, knowing that, you know, a lot of organisations, if not all shut outside of Monday to Friday, nine to five, that I would be offering my services, and I'm nonclinical, this is just around training seven days a week. So, if there are regional remote areas where people can't access any training until the weekend, I'll make myself available for that. But it is around ensuring that getting the information, cause the more people are on the information, they can make better decisions. and also, what I've also found, we found through our market research with our, with our product of Black Rainbow, it's not just First Nations communities who see those letters and go, what the hell does that mean? And what do we do next? So, we are finding that it's also non-Indigenous folk who looking at the work that we are doing here around this explanatory stuff and saying, wow, we would love access to that as well. So, they can.

Damien Riggs (41:42):

And I think a lot of what to me is really coming out today is that sort of need for a holistic approach. You know, we know that, that families are, if families are supportive, then that sort of reduces the risk of that impact of racism and homophobia that might be coming from outside of the family. But of course, if the family doesn't know about suicidality or has misconceptions about suicidal ideation or doesn't know how to listen or isn't

accepting of their children, then there's gonna that, that, that safety net isn't there. So, it is about bringing this sort of, and I think this is what Queeroboree has been doing from the first webinar onwards to today, is bringing together that holistic image of we need all of these things to be working in collaboration with one another. It's not just silos, individual things, we actually need the whole thing to come together to sort of mitigate suicidal, suicidal risk and responding when there is risk.

Dameyon Bonson (42:36):

Absolutely. And think Queeroboree also was born outta the fact that we didn't have our policymakers or government departments doing any of this work. So, we thought, you know what? We're gonna do it. We're not gonna wait for the policy to come out. We're just going to do it. And I think, you know, this being our third one and over 2000 registrations, I think Julie said there's like 2,400 or something and I maybe flexing a little bit and saying being more than what there actually was. But this speaks to the need that there are people that are interested in this information and they're recognising that this information is essential to the work that they do. One of the key things around Queeroboree and also being available virtually plus also online afterwards is in regional remote areas, access to this information is now a lot easier because it is going to be available online. Once upon a time, you did have to get on a plane and go to a conference and spend thousands of dollars. You don't have to do that anymore. Not for this stuff anyway, we offer this for free. This is what our donations go into is into create, be able to facilitate and pay for free education for folks.

Damien Riggs (43:43):

Thanks, Dameyon. And we've had another, probably the most beautiful question I think I've ever had on any of the MHPN webinars I've ever facilitated. It comes from a young person who's 11, they're non-binary and they're watching with their mum, and they've said are Aboriginal children accepted for being fluid like this? Will they like Aboriginal people, like trans people who are not Aboriginal to be their friends, so they don't want to hurt themselves?

Dameyon Bonson (44:10):

Absolutely. Yeah. Especially that last bit as well. I think for myself, I'm not trans or non-binary, but I, as a young gay kid, I think that I would've liked to have and no other gay kids. <laugh> What a beautiful question. I've forgotten the first half cause the second half just kind of knocked the wind outta me. Dameyon <laugh>,

Damien Riggs (44:32):

I think it's about acceptance and people caring if you feel like you might wanna hurt yourself.

Dameyon Bonson (44:36):

I think, you know, we see it in our families. And I travel quite a bit throughout the Northern Territory, and I've done a few laps now between Ayres Rock and Darwin and the families, they intrinsically are already loving and safe. and this is around that, an extra layer that can come through the information, through knowledge. some families are, are more across this than others and it really comes down to being able to have them understand who their child is and how to love them even more. Yeah.

Damien Riggs (45:08):

And obviously, we've got, you know, 24-hour helpline such as 13 YARN, but people have also asked questions around, is there anything special that you would want people watching today to know in terms of how to approach safety plans for suicidality for LGBTI Mob?

Dameyon Bonson (45:28):

Well one, the work hasn't been done in terms of what they would actually look like. And I can't, I don't want to speak with any kind of authority of what they should look like. I think it's making the best of what you have and if it, if it was me, it would be looking at what elements do I need to be able to bring in from both an LGBTI or a First Nations element and create, bring something together there. but I can't speak with any kind of authority on that and that's based on any research that would be making the best of what you've got. But it, what that does do, it signifies and signals that you know, this work is important because if practitioners are asking for this stuff, then something does need to be developed as a guide around that.

Damien Riggs (46:15):

And I think it comes back to what we were speaking about before. It's about a holistic approach. It's about what are the multiple factors that might be impacting upon Queer Mob rather than going, well, I'm gonna do a bit on this and then in a separate thing I'm gonna do an assessment on this. It's about how do we have this holistic conversation that looks at the multiple factors that are likely to impact suicidality for Queer Mob?

Dameyon Bonson (46:36):

Yeah, no, it's a long time. This guy's been, you know, over 20 years since I did any case work and one of the things that was always embedded in me is the person that you're working with is gonna be the expert in their lives. So that information is largely going to come from them. They are and they may not be able to articulate it in a way that is clear, but they may say it in a way that can give you some signs or lead you in directions to explore further. Cuz they may not have the language either as to why they're feeling that way, but also, they may not have the language to say, this behaviour that I'm engaging in is because of this. They may not be able to draw those links up as well.

Damien Riggs (47:19):

Yeah, and I think someone's, again, someone's just made a point that I think you made earlier, which is there are lots of similarities. We're running this Queeroboree series to focus on the specificities of what it means to be LGBTQA Plus and First Nations. But we also wanna acknowledge, as Dameyon said before, that a lot of these things are similar across groups as well. So, we're not saying there's necessarily exceptionalism going on that there's entirely unique ways of experiencing suicidality, suicidality for Queer Mob, but we are also wanting to acknowledge the specific factors that are impacting on Queer Mob. So, it's a bit of both that I think's going on here and someone just made that point, which I think is an excellent point.

Dameyon Bonson (48:02):

Yeah, it's this, the real, one of the other things is many purposes now for Queeroboree, but it's around identifying that as a population group at significant risk. So, at greater risk than First Nations people who are non-LGBTI and at Greater risk than LGBTI people who aren't First Nations. So, when in your, if you are in your service delivery if your organisation doesn't have a client base that is First Nations LGBTQTI perhaps look at the ways

in which you could strengthen your public-facing identity so that those folk feel comfortable after the walk through your door, that as an Aboriginal medical service or a mainstream organisation or as an LGBTI organisation.

Damien Riggs (48:47):

And that, perfect, Dameyon, that was a question that just came through asking, you know, we have services out here and we think that these services are, they're notionally funded to be available to LGBTI people/First Nations people, but people aren't walking through the door. And so, what Dameyon has just spoken about is this is maybe the things that are stopping talk people walking through the door. Is the signage clear? Are people getting the responses they need? The service might be funded to work with those communities, but are they getting the service responses they need?

Dameyon Bonson (49:19):

Think about your organisation as a business and not to try and bring capitalism into this work, into this space, but your business needs to have customers. And if you don't have customers coming through your front door, you need to advertise and promote yourself for a customer base. So, if you're finding that you're not reaching, you know the most or you know a diverse customer base, you think, well hang on, we haven't got a lot of men coming through here, we need to start advertising so that men will come in and purchase our product, not just women and vice versa. Think of your service like that. So, if your service is for everybody and everybody isn't coming through that front door, need to work out, okay, what do we need to do to ensure that everybody does come in through and access those services?

Damien Riggs (50:07):

Yeah. Excellent. we're getting towards the end of question time. There are a few more questions I think we could touch on usefully around again, suicidality, which is our focus today and people are very interested in people are interested in training around identifying warning signs for Queer Mob and they're also, people have supports available for family members of people who are, who are potentially bereaved by suicide,

Dameyon Bonson (50:36):

Bereaved by suicide from of First Nations LGBTQI or

Damien Riggs (50:40):

Yeah, yeah. When a family member has passed from suicide,

Dameyon Bonson (50:44):

We have a close relationship with Queer Space. On our socials, we direct people towards Queer space. And the reason we do that is they also provide support to people pre-COVID virtually. So, it's actually people also outside of Victoria. Your local health service I imagine should have some kind of bereavement support. I know I'm not too sure if there are the Aboriginal national ones to operate. So, it's a long time since I've come up for air and working out in remote communities. But locally there should be some kind of support network, whether through an Aboriginal Health Service, the LGBTI or through a mainstream one. If you have a PHN, a Primary Health Network in your region, I would give them a call cuz they would also probably have a good idea around and perhaps even fund a service like that in your area.

Damien Riggs (51:44):

Thanks, Dameyon, and thanks everyone for all the wonderful questions that came in before the webinar and all the wonderful ones that came in during the webinar today. Obviously, we can't get through all of them, it's not possible. But hopefully, the resources that Dameyon's provided that you can access by clicking on the three buttons gives you some more avenues to explore for research that you might access and obviously link in with Black Rainbow and with MHPN. And again, consider getting involved in creating a local area network around working with First Nations people. So, can we please go to the beginning of the wrap-up slides? Thank you very much. Before we move on to these, I'd just like to ask if Dameyon has any quick thing, you'd like to say in summary to wrap up, you know, what you've talked about today?

Dameyon Bonson (52:31):

Yeah, well thanks, Damien. And thanks to the MHPN and again for, you know, facilitating and, and supporting us in the work that we want to do. Something that Black Rainbow has been quite hands-on with in doing, doing our part is, I'm not too sure if people are aware there is a referendum coming up later this year. Black Rainbow has committed to supporting the Yes Vote, we think that we believe, and this is drawn on our only unique experiences as First Nations people, as First Nations LGBTQI people, I certainly bring to this to guess to my decision about this over 20 years of working in service delivery and regional and remote areas. It's the best chance that we've ever had as First Nations people to speak directly to governments around what it is that we need.

(53:22):

I don't see the voice as an advisory group. I see it as a really strong information centre. I think that there's been too much focus on the word advisory that people can ignore that, but if you provide people with evidence, you provide people with the information I think that carries a lot more weighting. But also, for First Nations Queer folk, we believe this is gonna be the, this will be the very first time that as First Nations LGBTQI people, we will have direct contact with the government. At the moment we are funnelled up through the Aboriginal health sector, which seems, doesn't really include us in their health work at a national level and also in the LGBTI stuff as well. We are not included in there. You can look across the LGBTI health frameworks or the research we're not evident. So, this gives us an opportunity to be able to speak directly to the government and say, hey, this is what we also need, this is what's going on. So, I would really encourage people to, you know, not just to vote yes, but understand what they're voting for, and we know that as people anyway, that decisions about us are always best made when we're actually part of the solution and can share with what we need.

Damien Riggs (54:40):

Thanks, Dameyon. That's beautifully said. Next slide, please. So, it was a real pleasure. I'm not sure if all of the 2000-plus people who registered attended today, but hopefully, you will all get a chance to watch if you didn't this webinar's been recorded, and you will receive information from MHPN very soon about how to access that recording. We would very much appreciate it if you would complete the feedback survey so we know what we're doing well and what we could do better. And we've certainly had wonderful feedback on the previous two Queeroboree webinars. You'll also receive your statement of attendance if that's useful for you and your workplace. And we really hope that you'll continue engaging with the work of Queeroboree as it comes up. We have another webinar for Queeroboree coming up in September this year, so stay tuned for information about that.

(55:30):

we also have other webinars coming up through the MHPN which might be really important for you. And again, there's a QR code here that you can scan for that information. So, we've got one I'm Supporting Patients with PTSD, and we've got an Emerging Mind one on Infant and Parent Mental Health coming up in August. And then we've got another one in August coming up on Latest Innovations to looking at Trauma Informed Care. So MHPN is always doing amazing work. It's excellent if you're on their mailing list to continue to receive that information so that you know what's coming up and it's always free. So, it's always an excellent resource to share within your networks and within your communities. Next slide, please. There's also amazing the MHPN group doesn't just run webinars. They also offer other amazing resources for people and, and included in that is podcasts.

(56:20):

And so, they have a three-part series available on emergency workers, which I think is an amazing topic to be talking about. And I think it's a very pressing topic here in Australia where we have lots of conversations about things like ramping, so what does it mean for people to be doing that work? And I think it's amazing that the, MHPN has a podcast series on that, and certainly another one that's very key and salient to today's webinar is a conversation about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Climate Change and COVID-19. And I think, you know, you may not think of those topics of easily going together, but if you pause for a moment and reflect, I think First Nations people have a lot to say about the effects of climate change since colonisation onwards. So, I'm sure that's a really exciting podcast series for you to listen to. Obviously, the focus on COVID-19 sits very well with the first Queeroboree that Dameyon explored in his research on the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous LGBTQIA+ people. Next slide, please.

(57:20):

So, we're very fortunate that MHPN across Australia supports over 350 networks, and obviously we're inviting you here today to put your hand up and signal that you might be interested in helping form another network that wouldn't focus on First Nations people with an of, of course, a focus on LGBTQIA+ people. So, we'd really encourage you to visit the MHPN network to talk about finding out what networks are available already. I know here in South Australia we have a gender and sexuality diversity one that you can join, and these are everywhere, but also whether you are interested in starting a new network. So obviously reaching out to MHPN, scan the QR code and begin those conversations, which can, you know, take many different forms. It can be you being part of your own organisation starting that it might be other colleagues that you work with. There are so many routes to forming those networks and MHPN is fantastically resourced to help you do that work and start those networks. So fantastic opportunities are available for everyone.

Last slide, please. So, before I close, I'd really like to acknowledge the lived experience people and carers who have lived with mental illness in the past, and those who continue to live with mental illness in the present. Thank you to everyone who joined us today. Thank you especially to Dameyon Bonson for the amazing work that he's doing through Black Rainbow. Thank you to Madi Day for leading the project that, that, that Dameyon spoke about today. And thank you to everyone for your amazing questions and especially the young person who joined today and asked us that beautiful question. Thank you everyone and enjoy the rest of your day.