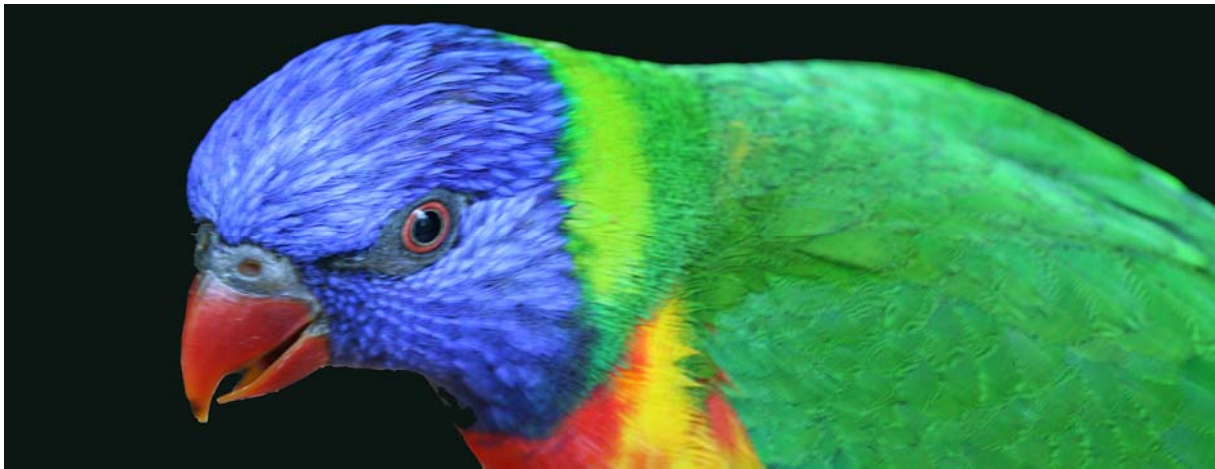


## Convergent Diversity



When I was growing up in the 1950s and '60s, there were only two genders and those who didn't fit comfortably within either one or the other were labelled as 'poofers' or 'lesbos'. There was no room for subtlety. I am so glad that we are moving away from that binary disrespect, because disrespect it was.

However, although people who are not heterosexual male- or heterosexual female-identifying are now readily regarded (and identify themselves) as fitting on the LGBTQI... spectrum of initialisms, we have clearly and sadly not progressed far. We still have a need to label and be labelled.

When increasing numbers of individuals decide that none of this collection of letters really fits for them, letters are added. An increasing subset of the alphabet is being pressed into service as we struggle to be more inclusive, and it will serve no-one. No matter how many pigeonholes we create, there will always be people who fit into none of them.

Nothing of what I'm saying here is meant as a criticism of anyone who wants to identify or be identified in any particular way. However, I am critical of our society, which cannot cope with individuals whom it cannot easily label and fit into an existing pigeonhole. As society adjusts to include changing awareness, sensibility and consciousness, the adjustment only seems to work with the creation of new labels.

I am a male-identifying white heterosexual and therefore privileged. I shouldn't complain, but I don't feel I totally fit into that pigeonhole, nor any of the others that are currently recognised, such as sensitive new-age man. I don't fit into the Australian macho male straight jacket – decades ago I learned to find the softer, more caring and feeling aspects of my being and it led to me feeling unrecognised and on the outer.

Every human being is capable of expressing a spectrum of feelings, thoughts and emotions. These spectra overlap, but if you force an individual to choose a pigeonhole, they are forced to cut off those aspects of themselves that don't fit into the restricted square space made available to them. In trying to allow more diversity, society still forces people into narrow definitions; people are still discouraged from full expression. If someone is 'identified' as being *T*, they must deny all that is not *T*. How sad.

I completely understand the need for people to be recognised for who they are. Distinguishing oneself from others so as not to be lumped together is an important part of this, but the need we have to label others too often leads to facile grouping of people that gets us no closer to understanding them and denies them their individuality. The problem is that, as soon as someone says, "I'm not *L*, I'm *B*", others will still not see them as a unique individual.

As soon as we see a label attached to someone, we make a raft of assumptions about them and will see everything about them through the filter of that label. The labelled person will also try hard to fit in with that label.

Identifying someone's gender and preferences in sexual expression only matters if we attach importance to these. And why should we? A person's sexual preferences are no more important than are their culinary preferences – and both can change over time. Their gender identity is no more relevant to who they truly are than is the colour of their skin or whether they have syndactyly.

In the last forty years or so we have seen the honorific 'Ms' become accepted as a way of removing the labelling of women as being married or unmarried. Society has now accepted that we don't need to know, yet there is no problem with any woman wanting to be addressed as 'Mrs'. Such changes take time and require a change in people's thinking and a letting go of the need to stick particular labels on each other. It should be possible to wean ourselves totally off this need. Doing so will create a society that is more tolerant and more inclusive, in which each individual can fully express who they are.

Oh, and yes, we will have to find a new set of personal pronouns that do not divide people according to the gender they were born with or that they identify with.