

A Leadership Opportunity

Russ Volckmann, PhD



Subscribe to
Integral
Leadership
Review

Leadership

Coaching

Training

About the Book

Order Book

About Russ

Archives

Links

Home Page

Sex, Spiral Dynamics and the Integral

Reflections by
Russ Volckmann, PhD

An exploration to the state of gender perspective and integral modeling, this essay looks at Spiral Dynamics from the point of view of inclusion of gender perspective and integral development. This is an important issue to comprehend in that Spiral Dynamics has already been demonstrated to be invaluable for creating change in human systems, for example in South Africa and the end of apartheid.

I had a wonderful opportunity to share a few hours with Dr Don Beck and a few colleagues exploring the Spiral Dynamics model. I have to admit that I am not a well-informed student of Spiral Dynamics. I have read portions of the book that Beck co-authored with Chris Cowan. I have had a few conversations with colleagues who are far more engaged and informed on the subject. I even subscribed to the Spiral Dynamics Yahoo group for a while until I decided that I couldn't keep up with all of the emails and the rest of my life, too.

Nor do I consider myself a well-informed scholar of Ken Wilber's work. I have read several of his books, numerous articles by him and others about his work and have been applying some concepts to the idea of integral coaching and integral leadership in organizations for several years now. I have been intrigued by Wilber's increasing embrace of the Spiral Dynamics model in his own work. Indeed, when Beck spoke to us he mentioned having just completed four days with Ken Wilber. He handed out a full-color brochure illustrating the Spiral Dynamics model in the holon format.

As I was reflecting on this experience and how it applied in my

own work, I recalled a comment in one of the articles I read (and I *must* find that article in my files) that the Spiral Dynamics model descriptions, particularly in the “lower” levels of development were essentially masculine and did not include the feminine perspective. I became curious about whether anyone was thinking and writing about this, for surely if we are to have an integral psychology or integral leadership and we are going to raise Spiral Dynamics to a place of prominence in this theory, the model must include both feminine and masculine qualities and perspectives.

Just a few short comments about the model to set the stage. These parallel Wilber’s description in a **Theory of Everything**. Spiral Dynamics offers a model of development through stages. Each stage is characterized by memes: “a basic stage of development that can be expressed in any activity” [Wilber, **Theory of Everything**, p. 7]. While arranged hierarchically, these memes are potentially available to everyone and we move among them under varying circumstances. Each level is characterized by a set of vmemes or value sets that characterize cultural elements at a given level.

Sex and Spiral Dynamics

Recently, I offered the following email message to a community of people who are among the best informed about Ken Wilber’s integral work and its relationship to Spiral Dynamics. Indeed, as you shall see, Dr. Don Beck, coauthor of **Spiral Dynamics**, was one of the people who responded.

**“Some time back I recall reading a critique of spiral dynamics that suggested, particularly for the lower level colors, that the feminine was not represented. I am sure I can find the reference in time, so I am not asking for help on that. I am interested to know if this issue has been addressed in the literature. Has there been an effort to review color descriptions accordingly?”
(11/16/01)**

Now before proceeding with the responses and my continuing thoughts on this, here are some samples of how some of these levels are represented by Ken Wilber, based on the work of Beck and Cowan. Chart 1 is a brief representation of all of the levels as described by Beck.

Chart 1
THE LIVING STRATA IN OUR PSYCHO-CULTURAL
ARCHEOLOGY

Stage / Wave	Color Code	Popular Name	Thinking	Cultural manifestations and personal displays
8	Turquoise	WholeView	Holistic	collective individualism; cosmic spirituality; earth changes
7	Yellow	FlexFlow	Ecological	natural systems; self-principle; multiple realities; knowledge
6	Green	HumanBond	Consensus	egalitarian; feelings; authentic; sharing; caring; community
5	Orange	StriveDrive	Strategic	materialistic; consumerism; success; image; status; growth
4	Blue	TruthForce	Authority	meaning; discipline; traditions; morality; rules; lives for later

3	Red	PowerGods	Egocentric	gratification; glitz; conquest; action; impulsive; lives for now
2	Purple	KinSpirits	Animistic	rites; rituals; taboos; superstitions; tribes; folk ways & lore
1	Beige	SurvivalSense	Instinctive	food; water; procreation; warmth; protection; stays alive

[Source: Presentation by Don Edward Beck, Ph. D at the State of the World Forum, New York, 2000. Stages of Social Development: The Cultural Dynamics that Spark Violence, Spread Prosperity, and Shape Globalization: **THE TWELVE POSTULATES.**]

The first three levels: beige, purple and red as summarized from Ken Wilber:

Beige: Archaic-Instinctual. Survival and safety needs. Habits and instincts used to survive. Distinct self is barely conscious. People band together for survival and perpetuation of life.

I find masculine and feminine present in this representation. Survival knows no gender boundaries. Perpetuation of life embraces sex and father/motherhood.

Purple: Magical-Animistic. We come together as ethnic tribes around an atomistic culture of magic, spirits and spells. By implication we join together around our ancestors to protect ourselves from forces beyond us.

In my mind, women have been purveyors of spells and cures, connected with nature and its secrets. While that perspective may be shaped by a peculiarly European view of history, it at

least symbolically brings the masculine and feminine together at this level, not excluding either.

Red: Power Gods. The emergence of the egocentric, heroic self and the power-based formation of feudal societies. Archetypal gods and goddesses, good and bad, are forces to be reckoned with in dominating others and enjoying self.

Here is where the distinctions begin to most clearly emerge. Even though goddesses are included in red calculations, they are relevant to the degree that they relate to power over others and individual hedonism. One might argue that an assumption here is that dominance and control are masculine tendencies and not feminine. This, by the way, is not an assumption I would wish to defend.

Notice how this description of red compares with one provided by Dr. Egbert L. Kinds [Discovered in Internet roving; source lost. I will be glad to make the entire document available on request.]

System 3: Energy and Power, Red

the ranking is specified by power. He who is stronger wins, even above seniority, if necessary by fratricide (much like many dynasties long ago). Bonding takes place through measurement of (often physical) strength. The weaker bond based on fear. People having equal power bond in pragmatic coalitions, which when circumstance gives cause, are as quickly severed as they were taken on. Revolt and combat are characteristic for the balance between giving and taking. Losers are not compensated and the winner is not aware of the price that must be paid. In this system one appears tough, assertive, bold, immoral and action directed. It is not necessarily intended evil but a conviction that "you must try to get everything within reach" and that "power justifies actions." As a reaction... experienced environment... is often innocent. Red trusts only himself and no one else. He fights to prevent shame and loss of face.

The masculine perspective appears to be dominant here to the extent that we buy the notion that the masculine can be

represented by a tough, assertive, bold action orientation. So there is some evidence that at least in earlier writings the emphasis was on the masculine with a diminished feminine perspective.

Except! Well, not really an exception, but a suggestion that the feminine has been well represented in higher levels of development. For example, the bonding and community orientation of green and its transcendence of rationality with a commensurate revitalization of Gaia, the Earth mother. So, does this imply that in our development we are moving from predominant masculine orientations to predominant feminine? Well, there are a lot of assumptions here about what constitutes masculine and feminine.

Responses to my Query

My understanding of masculine and feminine in Spiral Dynamics is to this point quite murky at best. That was why I posed the original question. I was hoping to discover that someone was taking this notion seriously and offering some fresh perspective. Here are some of the thoughts that were shared in response.

First, from a woman, Karin Swann:

Hello, I'm Karin and I couldn't resist commenting on my favorite topic.

Not sure about SD on Gender, but had Wilber's works been written by a woman, I postulate there would be more recognition of intersubjectivity (a vague reference, I know) and greater emphasis of the role that emotions/relationships play in unfolding development and ****healing**** (to balance out emphasis on cognition). (see footnote below) But there's more. Perhaps a more nuanced account of what happens at vision-logic/second-tier in terms of the specifics and "respective" challenges of integrating masc./feminine. And importantly, attention to the distinction between the understood "agreement" that kept women out of the public sphere and the unhealthy vMeme activity that sorely

limited women's freedoms (and men's!). This might translate into greater recognition of the role played by the lower left on lower right institutions in influencing hierarchical attitudes towards gender. This is the tricky territory. I'm reasonably convinced that there *have* been agreements historically (conscious and otherwise) between men and women which in the twentieth century were pejoratively (and rightly so) dubbed "inequality". These agreements had both structural/pragmatic dimensions and sexual/erotic ones (C.F. Tripp). But there's a fine line between power differentials that are necessary and sexy and those which are oppressive and limiting.

Finally -- and here I'm definitely moving into the territory of my thoughts as opposed to what I think women might say -- I think there might be more curiosity about masculinity. In fact, the whole gender issue might be appropriately complicated. The advances in our society made by women in still VERY recent years mark a still VERY nascent transformation in the relationship between the sexes (I think we often overlook this). I really think it's premature to confidently assert that we know where we are going. Gender is complex and multidimensional which is best explored at least in part as a process. I often feel it undergoes a painful reduction in complexity in these theories.

Hope no one minds my blurting in from out of the blue!

Karin Swann

Footnote: As a bit of a case in point related to my last comment, women vary A LOT. So whatever we say about "them" or about "men" must, in my opinion, be held in the context of "not knowing for sure". I think this requires accepting the reality of difference with the contributions of the postmodern critique of difference **at the same time** and seeing what emerges. It's quite a challenge.

[Source: email to the LOD Yahoo group.]

Aside from the generally thoughtful response, here we have a well presented restatement of the issue of how masculine and feminine inform and relate to spiral dynamics and integral development. First, the response reflects my own shifting back and forth between male and female (genders) on the one hand and masculine and feminine (perspectives, energy, archetypes) on the other. Someone might do us a great service of analyzing Spiral Dynamics from the latter stance.

Second, Karin's suggestion about an emphasis on intersubjectivity and the "greater emphasis of the role that emotions/relationships play in unfolding development and 'healing" suggests a beginning in ways of distinguishing masculine and feminine: (1) intersubjectivity and (2) emotions/relationships in development. Both are presumable feminine in character.

Karin added another comment:

In an earlier correspondence with Don -- and I hope you don't mind me quoting you Don -- Don acknowledges the complexity:

"[gender] is complex and challenging and we are too often trapped in our stereotypes and symbolic categories. Obviously, I have a great deal of trouble with "male" and "female" groupings. No doubt hormones, brain dominance differences, and a host of other role definitions impact all of us."

and,

"We exist in the tension zones between systems on the decline and systems on the rise. Each person's momentary worldview will contain elements of both warm and cool colors, rather than pure types. The key is to search for HOW people are thinking rather than WHAT they are thinking."

Perhaps, Don, you could say something about your "admixture" approach to development which, imho,

provides considerable flexibility for assessing gender as a variable in development.

[Source: email to the LOD Yahoo group.]

So here we have a sense of a platform, a foundation of our approach to masculine and feminine in Spiral Dynamics and integral development. This is a challenging question.

Regardless of gender we are each a mixture of the colors and their vmemes. And this is all about how people are thinking (and presumably feeling); it is the method, the process, the system, not the content.

And Dr. Don Beck offered some additional thoughts, preliminary, because this is, indeed, a complex subject.

Just a quick note to make one level of response. If one looks at the gender issue through the lens of each of the vMeme codes, it should be clear that major differences were perceived and implemented. The reporting of those patterns in the model itself does not bend the concept in any direction since it is only describing the prevailing mindsets of the day. (Always exceptions, of course).

Survival Beige would put the strong on the outer ring and the "woman and children" in the middle as do elephants. Physical size and strength were the key variable.

Tribal Purple clearly delineated separate "male" and "female" roles in both food gather (economics) and even in living arrangements. One can still see this pattern in the Amazon. There were, of course, matriarchal societies but, apparently, they were more the exception than the norm.

Red Empires once again reflected power, strength, speed, and cunning, with high testosterone levels (which can also exist in "female" chemistry). There is always the Attila the Hen and Tanya Harding. Unhappily, history was written by the dominant "Male" society so who knows about powers behind

the throne, hands that rocked the cradle, and other indirect expression of "female" power bases.

Blue Ideology, most often constructed by dominant "Male" influences, set the horizontal categories, placing males/masculine at the top and female/feminine at the bottom in the rank system, as with Taliban, or the Indian cast system, or First Baptist Church ideology.

Orange Enterprises shifted the focus to "merit" and this is where the process of gender equality started to form.. "If they can hack it, " I was often told, "they can do what ever they please." (Of course, this often was counter balanced by the famous glass ceiling.)

Green Egalitarians, of course, removed any vestige of discrimination, especially in the deconstruction phase, and even elected to produce a revisionist view of history, as all vMeme codes are want [sic] to do.

In terms of our own assessment over the years, there is a slight tilt of "women" in the direction of the cool colors, and of men toward the "war" colors. Note the word "tilt" for groups since this does not predict the trajectory of any single human being. It could be that this reflects left/right brain dominance as much as gender with "females" or maybe "feminine" having the advantage of a larger connective conduit between the hemispheres, maybe as a feature in child bearing and child rearing. Who knows?

I would suspect that, over the last twenty years, especially as women moved out of type, file and smile jobs and into responsible management positions, one would see an elevation of both ER-Orange and GT-Yellow. I found this emergence into GT-Yellow in the wives of members of the Young President's Organization, as their husbands were sunk in the Orange swamp with a slight regression toward the Blue they never got at home but need

now.

Finally, don't forget the role of both IQ and temperament which are independent variables. Masculine and feminine related behavioral patterns may stem from temperament rather than reflect vMeme codes. So, to make a long story short, if Spiral Dynamics symbols in the Beige to Blue zones has a heavier Male presence, it is because that is precisely the way society was ordered as the various Life Conditions shaped the vMemetic responses.

If we had the time to do a careful content analysis of all the words in the book, and in the series of SD presentations, and visuals used etc. one might find a pattern, one that reflects how each of the vMememes have dealt with the issue of gender etc. A clear transformation would appear in the middle of Orange and become quite apparent in the transition into Green.

This is about all I know on the subject.

[Source: email to the LOD Yahoo group.]

I am so appreciative of these thoughtful responses. There appears to be some confirmation of the idea that the higher up the spiral one moves, the more masculine and feminine dynamics are integrated as more and more feminine elements appear (as opposed to male female). The levels (colors) seem to represent social dynamics at various stages of development and the meaning associated with those dynamics.

Masculine and Feminine

This leads me to wonder if there is a model of masculine and feminine that could be examined in relation to the levels of Spiral Dynamics. Or are these just convenient labels that are applied ideologically? My own proclivity is to turn to the work of Carl Jung as a place to begin to unravel this.

No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. The fact is, rather, that very

masculine men have -- carefully guarded and hidden-- a very soft emotional life, often incorrectly describes as 'feminine.' A man counts it a virtue to repress his feminine traits as much as possible, just as a woman, at least until recently, considered it unbecoming to be "mannish." The repression of feminine traits and inclinations naturally causes these contrasexual demands to accumulate in the unconscious. No less naturally, the imago of woman (the soul image) becomes a receptacle for these demands, which is why a man, in his love-choice, is strongly tempted to win the woman who best corresponds to his own unconscious femininity--a woman, in short, who can unhesitatingly receive the projection of his soul..

It seems to me, therefore, that apart from the influence of woman there is also the man's own femininity to explain the feminine nature of the soul-complex.

[Source: Carl Jung, Collected Works, 7, 297-298.]

The works of Jung, Emma Jung, James Hilman and others is rife with explications of the masculine and feminine in many aspects, most notably as anima and animus, the feminine and masculine archetypes.

The anima and the animus are two archetypal figures of especially great importance. They belong on the one hand to the individual consciousness and on the other hand are rooted in the collective unconscious, thus forming a connecting link or bridge between the personal and the impersonal, the conscious and the unconscious...

However, the character of these figures is not determined only by the latent sexual characteristics they represent; it is conditioned by the experience each person has had in the course of his or her life with representatives of the other sex, and also by the collective image of woman carried in the psyche of the individual man, and the collective image of man carried by the woman.

[Source: Emma Jung, **Animus and Anima**, New York: Spring Publications, 5th Printing, 1974, pp. 1-2.]

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail the anima and animus. I do hope, however, that these two comments point to two strategies for thinking about masculine and feminine in the developmental psychology of Spiral Dynamics.

The first is to understand that masculine and feminine exist as aspects of our psychology at all levels of the spiral. As Don Beck pointed out, this concerns the "how" of the development of masculine and feminine in the way we think or in how we make meaning at each level of development. I prefer the term, making meaning, because it opens up the knowing process to include thinking and feeling, the intellect and the emotions. The lesson from Jung is that the meaning that is made is, to a large extent, the product of the experience of the unique individual. However, this experience is generated in the context of a culture, a collective unconscious, a lower right quadrant, the history that provides the mythological foundation of our meaning-making.

The second is to treat the developmental levels as different stages of the integration of masculine and feminine. For me, this would be problematic since both principles exist throughout the stages. However, there may be something about the implied relationship between masculine and feminine in the process of development, in the processes of our meaning making, in a growing integration of spirit and soul. This strategy would in no way negate the notions of multiple streams in varying stages of "development" at any given moment for each individual. Indeed, Don Beck pointed out that intelligence and temperament are independent variables. As such they do not related directly to vmemes. Culturally, this might relate to what Karin Swann referred to as the "fine line between power differentials that are necessary and sexy and those which are oppressive and limiting." Perhaps at heart of all of this is movement from oppression to equity and freedom. Now how green can you get? Or perhaps I am merely trapped in my temporary world view.

Perhaps there will a next step in these reflections.

Russ Volckmann, PhD, LeadCoach™ ↗
733 Mermaid Avenue, Pacific Grove, CA
93950

(831) 333-9200

Copyright © 2001, 2002, All Rights Reserved, Russ
Volckmann

Even everyday people succeed
with **everyday**
wealth

