

Book Review

Knowing Me, Knowing You: An Integrated SocioPsychology Guide to Personal Fulfillment & Better Relationships.

Keith E. Rice. 2006. Victoria, BC: Trafford.

Reviewed by Sara Ross

Keith Rice's book offers 337 pages packed with information and opportunities for reflection. The premise of the work is that "by aligning and integrating previously uncoordinated works of reliable science, [it] provides the means to understand the causes of personal and interpersonal problems." From the understanding so gained, the reader "can then determine the best means of dealing with the issues." Following from that, the purpose of the book is to help readers (a) understand why they and others are the way they are, (b) surmise what they might be able to do if they do not like things the way they are, and (c) develop strategies to have more fulfilling life experiences and relationships.

Rice has ambitious expectations for the reception, perceptions, and outcomes of his first book. Asserting that "This book will change Your Life!!!!" (p. 1), he aims to enable the reader to "have a greater appreciation of the sheer diversity in both your own thoughts and motivations and those of others with whom you have relationships" (p. 5) and aims to "align and integrate the behavioural sciences" (p. 5). He begins with stating his intent to provide an "overarching 'approach' – a *meta-approach*, if you will – to incorporate and align all the other 'approaches'" and use "all the elements of the behavioural sciences and complementary hard sciences" to explain psychology and "group dynamics and the influence of cultures and the societies people live in" (p. 2). A concluding claim is "with the information provided in this book, there can be no more excuses for repeated failures. Now, we must hone our understanding to be ever more precise in the design of our interventions, strategies, and therapies" (pp. 336-337). This review sketches how he executes his agenda, and offers both appreciative and critical reflections on it.

Reporting on the Book

Fittingly, the first of the book's two parts—*Knowing Me*—is dedicated to taking the reader on an exploration of self and the "selves" of the self. The second part—*Knowing You*—covers a range of topics from conflict, to gender, to relationships of the romantic, the parent-child, and the workplace. Each part closes with a section on "troubleshooting."

The first two sections of *Knowing Me* aim to disrupt readers' assumptions about the nature of the "self" and its changeability. Rice introduces Susan Blackmore's concept of "selfplex" as a confluence of memes, and reports her contention that beyond existing as biological machines, what people perceive as "self" is a "mind of physiologically-embedded concepts" (p. 17). With the introduction of the meaning of *memes* as ideas or concepts that individuals consolidate into various schemas that shape their behaviors and beliefs, Rice invites readers to make choices about discarding the schemas that have undesirable roles in their lives.

Next, Rice introduces the ideas of temperament and personality, using an axis to represent Jung's introversion-extroversion spectrum, then Eysenck's addition of two more axes: one to indicate the stable-unstable spectrum and another, the spectrum of impulse control-psychoticism. Sprinkled in for additional context, Rice includes a few mentions of biological research related to various dimensions of temperament. He provides Eysenck's Personality MiniTest, a fill-in questionnaire for readers' self assessment. Rice offers readers the following advice as the section closes: despite what you may hear from others, there are some aspects of temperament that cannot be "fixed." Readers are encouraged in this section, and others, to internalize that there are some physiological bases of human behavior and a quality of *more or less-ness* with some kinds of individual change, e.g., basic temperament.

The next four sections introduce readers to Self as Identity and identity's place in Robert Dilts' "neurological levels" lineup. Dilts' framework is referred to in various parts of the book to unify dimensions Rice introduces. From environment at its base, the sequence goes to behavior, then skills and knowledge, then values and beliefs, then to identity. Spirituality is at the apex and Rice periodically brings spirituality into the discussion to explain to readers why he does not include spirituality in his overall work. From Dilts, Rice introduces Graves' work popularized as Spiral Dynamics, using much the same kind of language as Beck and Cowan's book, *Spiral Dynamics*. He offers a table for the theoretically inclined, which compares Graves/Spiral Dynamics levels with other stage theories. Another table illustrates how the Graves/Spiral Dynamics levels "sound" in adult thinking about domains of work, home, personal relationship, children, friends, and community.

Five more sections in Part One develop the concept of life conditions' interactions with identity and values/beliefs, the role of memetics, and dynamics of change, including the Spiral Dynamics *gamma trap*. In applying Graves' core concept of life conditions, Rice highlights the concept's dynamism by relating it to Bandura's concept of *reciprocal determinism*. Rice's effort can aid those who want to learn how to think about interactive dynamics of behaviors and social and other environmental constraints. The idea of the multiple "selves" and vMememes (schema in the larger culture) represented by Spiral Dynamics levels is used to introduce origins and nature of memetic conflict. Along the way, Rice brings back into the equation more discussion of temperaments and spectrums and their relation to memetic considerations and more on psychopathology.

By the 13th section, Rice has foundations laid sufficiently to take readers through several models to integrate psycho-logics involved in self-talk, or "Meta-Stating." Such self-talk is a gestalt of confluent factors. They may include the schema with which a person operates, whether a temperamental disposition, psychopathology, environmental interactions and/or circumstances lead a person to attribute causation to self-doing or "out there," and the perennial role of vMemetic factors.

Part One closes with Rice's troubleshooting advice for understanding and coping with stress and related movements across the spectrums he introduced throughout the journey. His *13 Tips for Your Psychological Health* summarize key points in Part One.

Rice introduces Part Two by citing its emphasis on the dynamics in relationships and "how you can influence those who impact upon your Life Conditions," with an acknowledgement that "where you can most influence others is in the Life Conditions their vMEMES will interact with" (p. 193, emphasis in the original). To span its terrain, Part Two introduces additional models, some from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), some for self-assessments, and some to integrate additional insights from brain research. It, too, dedicates many pages to introducing

Spiral Dynamics' offerings for understanding conflicts, including translating Maslow's hierarchy of needs as the outcomes desired by memetic activity. Along the way, as in Part One, psychological theory is sprinkled in discussions (e.g., Eysenck's work, Reactive Attachment Disorder).

After its introductory sections, Part Two applies and adds to the concepts introduced throughout the book to discuss gender issues including biological influences, man-woman relationship issues, and child-parent, school, and workplace relationships. These sections are largely constructed with Spiral Dynamics interpretations and recommendations for interactions with others. The Part Two "troubleshooting" finale includes *21 Tips for Managing Relationship Disharmony* which like its Part One counterpart is a summary of key points and advice from Part Two.

Rice's conclusion expresses the hope that as a reader worked through the book's "extensive body of knowledge" that s/he will have "calibrated yourself, others you interact with and the relationships you have with them" (p. 335). On the assumption that clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists of many kinds will be among his readership, he delivers stern advice:

You work with some of the most vulnerable people in society but many of the assumptions about human nature your disciplines have worked with in the past are revealed now to be flawed. Please – *please!* – use the knowledge and understanding provided through *Integrated SocioPsychology* to apply your skills and expertise with greater precision (p. 337).

To readers at large, he advises: "you now have great knowledge: use it wisely to make a positive difference both for yourselves and for others" (p. 337).

Keith Rice has high expectations for the impacts of this book upon his readers and how they will employ them. He has supplied a concentrated span of Spiral Dynamics applications, in book form, to a practical range of domains of life domains. He has integrated those dynamics with other psycho-logics to help readers have a fuller understanding of how they and others behave. He includes a page of web-based resources for readers to pursue referenced work in more depth.

Appreciative and Critical Reflections, and Questions

There is much in this book to appreciate from various perspectives. Rice attempts to supply a reader with enough information and examples to begin to understand himself or herself as a dynamic system; a system of different personality tendencies and "selves" or value systems; a system rooted in biological, neurological, and life-conditioned "hard wiring" and variances. For readers who notice these dynamics going on within them, there is a further benefit. Rice's discussions and examples in Part Two pave the way to internalize how systems interact. Taken as a whole, the book could help people develop metasytematic understandings in at least interpersonal domains. These would be worthwhile developmental contributions.

At the same time, it seems that Rice may assume that reading about others' models and selected scientific facts are essential paths to self-knowledge. For some or many readers, such "out there" tidbits may not serve the quest for "in here" knowledge of self (or others). Yet, for those who track with Rice's presentation, this book could help them understand a human being as a system in which many shifting and interactive dimensions are active. Such understanding could support *experiencing* one's own existence as a system. Such experience precedes capacities to notice, reflect on, and begin to make sense of self-complexity. A book that performs

such a service deserves praise. His examples may help readers begin to understand “self as system,” a vital part of the journey to multi-perspectival living.

I believe Rice provides a useful introduction to Clare Graves’ conception of value systems and how they show up in relation to life conditions. The presentation seems likely to enable readers to recognize that neither they nor any human being “is” a value system. This means Rice’s readers may be unlikely to label people (as in, “she’s Blue,” “he’s Orange,” “they’re Green”) based on levels of the colorful spiral that is used in popular versions of Graves’ work.

Another service performed by some of the examples is bringing to life the Gravesian concept of interacting with “life conditions,” by applying the concept, not just referring to it. He provides many examples that bring the concept to life, in real-life interactions. It is worth iterating the point made earlier: Rice’s effort can aid those who want to learn how to think about interactive dynamics of behaviors and social and other environmental constraints. Without such thinking, as is often reflected when people talk “in colors,” Graves’ genius in understanding the complex evolution of human behaviors can remain untapped, and Spiral Dynamics-related applications can be shallow, if not harmful.

The positive services performed by Rice’s book seem to be accompanied by some biases, contradictions, confusions, and incomplete efforts to accomplish the aimed-for integration. Some of these are theoretical issues, some of these are developmental issues, and some are a combination of the two. Some are issues that could impact readers and/or their associates in unhelpful ways. These latter are results of the former, and it seems important to mention them here and to raise larger questions that they may imply.

Heterosexual Bias

Alongside its aim to have biology and neuroscience help to integrate the psychological and the social, the book reflects a curious, unnecessary, and unnecessarily consistent, heterosexual bias. Rice does not anywhere in his examination of relationship issues acknowledge or address homosexual relationships. Such a bias is particularly striking, given the sciences the work draws from. This is not raised here as an issue of political correctness. Rather, I suggest the issue is one of (a) putting balanced science at the service of readers and (b) advocating for integral awareness of multiple perspectives and life experiences without blindness to their existence. The failure to acknowledge non-heterosexual experience anywhere in this book while presuming heterosexuality throughout it gives this reader the impression of an implicit bias in the author. *How might integrating perspective-taking with knowledge from the soft and hard sciences help to transform such biases where they exist?*

Other People as Objects

Despite its aim to support better relationships, periodically the book takes an approach that treats other human beings as objects. Such stances are unlikely to support healthy relationship-building. For example: “So now you know what you want from your relationships, how do you tell the other person(s)? . . . [The other person may have] a different vMEMETIC set-up than the memes we’re attempting to infect them with” (p. 219). When I am in a relationship, I tell my partner what I want in our relationship and he does likewise. Such sharings are essential reciprocal exchanges that inform our co-creative efforts to build the relationship and mutual understanding. They would run aground rapidly if either of us were trying to “infect” the other

with wanting what we want the other to want. *How might we live into an integral notion of the Golden Rule where relationships are co-constructed with others, not done to others?*

Simplism of “Infection”

As the foregoing quotation suggests and evident in the book’s discussions of them, the concepts of memes and v-memes can be conducive to mechanistic, reductionistic, and/or atomistic applications. These concepts can make the dimensions underlying complex personal, interpersonal, and socio-cultural dynamics seem like “things” that we can label, see, and manipulate. That is not the case. After all, if it were that easy to change such dynamics by infecting others with “things” like memes to make them change, our relationships—and the world—could be free of misunderstandings and conflict already! Mindsets behind such approaches can support manipulating objects, but humans are not objects. The concepts can quickly obliterate the dynamic reciprocal interactions (and their role in development) that Graves’ original work illuminated and that Rice promotes. *What might the study and application of Graves’ work accomplish (and how might it support integration more generally) if Beck & Cowan’s insertion of memetics were detached from it?*

Confusion About Human Development

The book reflects some confusion about human development—what it *means* that Gravesian systems “emerge in symbiotic interaction with the Life Conditions in the Environment” (p. 189). As the excerpts below indicate, this could be like a roller coaster of contradictions for some readers. It could lead to harmful expectations of self and others. The confusion mirrors much of the Spiral Dynamics-related discourse when some say “the entire Spiral is already within” and some say its double-helix dynamics are about persons’ gradually maturing development (levels of existence) depending on their contexts (life conditions). Rice adds to the confusion with his interpretation of Beck’s “various postings” to the Spiral Dynamics-integral list serve: “Beck . . . does imply that there is a maturational factor in the emergence of vMEMES. He has not said explicitly that vMEMES are programmed to emerge in sequence as someone develops through life, irrespective of the Life Conditions; but the implications are inescapable” (p. 189). His subsequent sorting effort does not resolve the confusions. *How might a community of the interested reach a point of committing to a sustained inquiry where such confusions are unpacked, understood, coordinated, and growth-full to resolve?* Confusing contradictions about the nature of human development run through such examples as the following.

If the Life Conditions predicate ORANGE thinking, then don’t be surprised if there’s not much TURQUOISE around (p. 99). As indicated by the assignation of Kohlberg’s [stage] 4.5 to Erikson’s *Peer Relationships* stage, we would hope that ORANGE would be starting to emerge in the thinking of most young people by their mid-teens. Realistically we know that this is far from being the case. However, that doesn’t mean you won’t find ORANGE and vMEMES beyond in a secondary school classroom. The reality is that we could take a class of middling ability 15-year-olds and discover all the vMEMES were active – even YELLOW, possibly even TURQUOISE (p. 312)!

Don't beat your head against a brick wall trying to get someone to become something they can't be or are not ready to be. For example, it's completely unreasonable to expect GREEN thinking from somebody who's never climbed the Spiral beyond RED (p. 329).

Sometimes 2nd Order Revolution can be so powerful it appears we can go up the Spiral by two or more vMEMES almost instantaneously. This is termed 'Quantum Leap' (p. 121). As discussed in Chapter 9, transitions between vMEMES can be near instantaneous. However, in many instances the process can take some considerable time.... (p. 150).

So, the BIG QUESTION: can you self-actualise to YELLOW thinking – or are you trapped in 1st Tier worldviews (p. 97)? If you're not happy with the way things are, can you go meta – self-actualise from YELLOW thinking – to look beyond your own reactions to the Life Conditions (p. 106)? Of course, if you have 2nd Tier vMEMES activated in your psyche, then temperament may not be much of an issue, anyway (p. 139)!

Rice does not tell his readers how he defines the universe of the behavioural sciences. He certainly mentions a number of "elements of the behavioural sciences," but certainly not the "all" that he claims. His grandiose claims sprinkled throughout the book may challenge readers' patience if they are not taken as true. Nonetheless, the work does indicate that he is making valuable connections among models and premises. For readers who can take it all in, his correlation of multiple models could lead to integrated insights about human functioning.

Conclusion

Despite the weaknesses noted here, I believe the book has noteworthy potential benefits to its readers. Some pearls of great price in the book include the discussions and illustrations of systems of relations, e.g., the feedback loops of particular individual behaviors on another, the roles of environment and structure, and the multiple "selves" within one human being. These and other points that Rice makes could enrich ongoing dialogue in a community of the interested. That, in turn, could support and inform Rice's noble efforts. It would support his plea that we must not go on repeating our failures in relationships, politics, law enforcement, business, education, and armed forces' commands. Perhaps it would even encourage more widespread efforts to build and integrate knowledge—of self, of others, and of the social worlds we co-construct and share.