

# THE FOUR DIMENSIONAL SELF

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I remember very well a night — 5 or 6 years ago. It was going on ten o'clock and I was finishing up a discussion with a dentist in my office. As he was going out the door, he said that I sounded like Einstein. I asked him what he meant and he said: "Well, you talk about movement, about people moving toward objects and other people, about time like my impatience and about the depth of feelings that people have inside them. You make them all relate to each other and that's what Einstein did with time and space." When he left, I stole some of my children's books and began to read about Einstein, relativity, time, space and the natural laws that apply to objects. It became increasingly clear that these same laws apply to people with the exception that objects respond blindly. People have within them the ability to play one law against another so that they can change and modify their destiny. When they become emotionally undefined, undifferentiated and confused, they respond blindly. They abdicate their freedom, their ability to determine their existence to some degree. They abdicate themselves and the people they live with and care about. In this brief article, I would like to explain how the notions of time, space and relativity apply in a very practical way to the definition of self, of the person.

As you read this article, I would like you to take these ideas and shift between understanding them and the experiences that you have had in your own family and the families that you see. See if they apply. From my viewpoint they grow out of clinical experience and are designed to: (1) Promote tracking. By this I mean the ability to follow an interview. It is important to know exactly where the members of the family are at any given moment. One must be able to follow the flow of movement. (2) Make everything add up. An interview is a point in time. It is artificial, particular and representative of that moment. It may not fit into the overview — the larger picture of where the family is. For example, a father may be very sentimental because the subject is death. That may indicate that he is generally sentimental or that he is only so with death. The particular events must fit into the overview of the family over generations. (3) Indicating the move and direction that is called for. Since the beginning of time, people have had generalizations about the human phenomena — be good — love thy neighbor — be defined. To be useful, to be functional, a concept must have practical implications. It must indicate the direction that I, you, he/she should head in if we hope to

accomplish a specific goal. A concept should say something specifically, not just preach or lecture.

(4) If such a concept is valid, one should be able to make predictions from it. It should be able to say, "Given the present pattern, such and such will occur." I realize this is a "wild" idea. It upsets people to know that they are generally predictable.

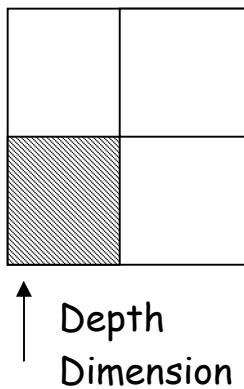
(5) Ultimately, an idea should hit the nail on the head. Much time is spent in training people to "be able to relate to the other." People come to us in trouble. The best way to form a relationship in that context is to say something so that they say, "Yeah, that's it. That's where I'm at." They have been heard. If one can answer to the limits of his wisdom or stupidity — then he has done what he can do. This is what I propose to define.

## Definition of Terms

The depth dimension: The first dimension of self is the depth dimension. It is a conglomerate, a combination of all the elements that go into the makeup of a person. It includes the spiritual elements, abstract and concrete thinking, feelings that enter into awareness and emotional processes that are often out of awareness, physical elements that include the body, nervous system, genes, physical symptoms — the complete physical makeup of the person. It includes imagination and the ability to have hallucinations and delusions — the capacity to become psychotic. In terms of these elements, I may feel or think that I am knowledgeable about them in four ways. (A) I know them, am aware of them and believe in them. There is a sense of sureness. (B) a gray area. I know or understand them in part but could learn more or differently about them. In this awareness, my depth dimension is in a state of flux or change. My mind is open to a new idea or perception. (C) That which is unknown but available to me if I so desire. I could go to a library and find out about it if I so desired. (D) That which is unknown and, at least at the present, unknowable. No matter how I tried there is no present way to discover the answer. Example of these: (A) I believe that schizophrenia represents the withdrawal of a person from the outer reality of people and objects to an inner reality. The reality as perceived in the depth dimension becomes reality and is not crosschecked by things outside of the self. (B) I am not sure what to do about this so I am open to new approaches and different ideas. Yet, I do have some ideas. I do see it as a part of a family process and believe that anti-psychotic medications often help (C) Much research has been done and I am not very familiar with lots of it.

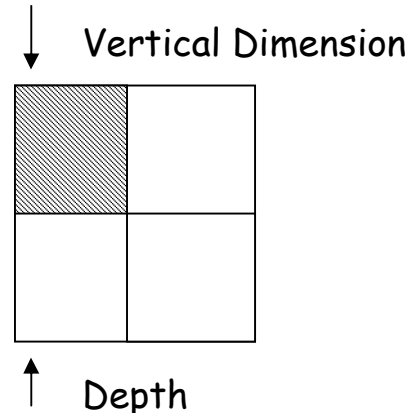
Yet, I could learn more about research if I read some books. (D) The real cause of schizophrenia is unknown and unknowable at the moment. It goes beyond us. Whatever its cause, genetic, physical, environmental, systematic family process, its cause will be found in the depth dimension.

The hallmark of the depth dimension is that there is no movement. It is akin to a rich but underdeveloped country. The land has untold resources lying in it but nobody is tapping them. They simply lie there. It is all capacity and no actuality. The resources may be known or unknown but nothing is happening. It is similar to the professional "patient" who keeps learning more and more about himself but never seems to utilize his knowledge to do something different. In summary then, the depth dimension is all that a person is but has no movement. Work in the depth dimension involves asking if I really do know what I believe I know, avoiding black and white statements about gray areas, getting new knowledge when it is either useful or necessary and accepting the fact that some things are unknowable. This involves the intellectual process of seeking new factual knowledge and the emotional process of new experience. Both of these demand movement and so, one cannot have change by dealing with the depth dimension alone. How well we all know this — Insight without movement equals paralysis.

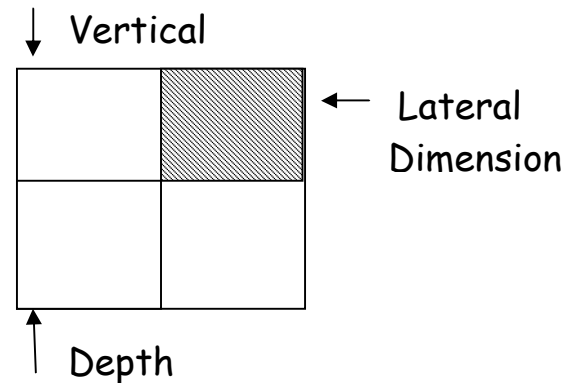


The vertical dimension: This is the first movement dimension of self — of the person. It represents movement toward objects. In practical or clinical terms, it is often mixed in with movement toward people. In its purest form it involves eating a sandwich, watching television, reading the mail or a newspaper, having a drink, taking a shot of heroin, bringing work home from the office, cleaning the house to the point of perfection, having a cause such as money, politics or religion that dominates and rises above the people in the family. In a mixed form it involves things like going to work where one does a job or performs a task but is also involved with people. Within the

vertical dimension itself, exclusive of people, movement may take the two extremes of too much or not enough. Obsessions with noise in the car, with making sure all the doors are locked twenty times, repetition of words, etc. represent clinical examples of too much vertical movement. Putting off necessary tasks around the house, not going to work, inadequate housekeeping, represent insufficient movement in the vertical dimension. In an age of highly personal involvement and expectation, vertical movement toward objects tends to be disparaged. But it is important. Without it, nobody works, eats, reads, enjoys music, plants a flower or writes a book.

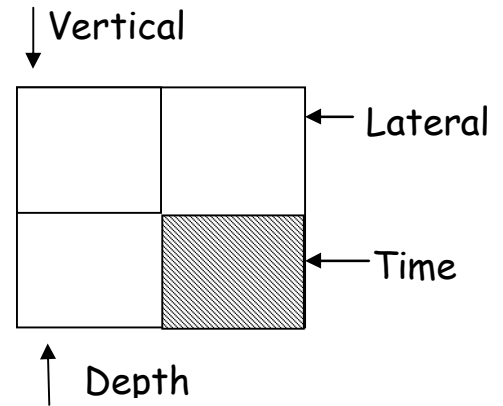


Lateral dimension: The second dimension of movement is toward people. It is the dimension of the personal relationship. It is where people feel close, connected, involved. It is the hallmark of the age we live in. It, too, can be seen in pure form or mixed in with vertical movement toward objects. It, too, can be at one end of the spectrum or the other. In its pure form it is experienced by the emptiness and desolation of death or by the joy and ecstasy of marriage and birth. In its mixed form it is experienced by the salesman who tells a story, asks personal questions and then takes a client to dinner to make an object sale. People refer to it as closeness. It is hard to define but one knows when he has it. Without it, he cries. It is an openly, highly emotional dimension. A father says, "If I work I can send my son to college. If I work too much, I will never know him. If I do both, I will send him to college, I will know him, but inside of me (in my depth dimension) there is nothing left for me."



The fourth dimension — time: Of all the dimensions of self, time is the most difficult to explain. Everybody experiences time and nobody knows what it is. It is the dimension of relativity. It comes and goes. It is what we have — the duration of our life, birth, death, experience. It is limited. It has a past, a present, a future. It involves movement since movement takes time. Paralysis is a waste of this precious commodity. Classically, children think that time will solve problems and adults worry about not having much of it left. It is a striking fact that very little has been done to place time as an important aspect of the self.

Time affects all the dimensions of self. It takes time to introspect, to look into self and become aware of self. Yet, endless introspection leads to paralysis and a perpetuation of the status quo. The vertical dimension of movement toward objects and the lateral dimension of movement toward people take time because all movement proceeds over time. Yet, too much time can be spent on either and not enough on what is within self. So time must be proportioned and used as a valuable dimension. Time also has a past, a present and a future. The past is there to learn from so that the future can be different. The present is there so that one can make change. All movement occurs in the present. The wisdom of learning from the past and the effort of doing something different in the present will allow the future to be different. All three aspects are necessary and serve their own specific needs. The problems of time are best described clinically. First one must know that it exists and that it is significant. If one wants to get "with" someone else, he must operate in the same time frame. A wife may be operating in a past time frame, full of bitterness over events that happened ten or twenty years ago. Of such stuff are vendettas built. She may be married to the husband who says, "Forget it." He will bring flowers home and expect that she will appreciate it. She is in the past and he is in the present. A father will talk about education so his son's future will be secure. The son may talk about going to a party so his present will be happy. All time frames are real and legitimate. Each person is in a different one. This is akin to speaking two foreign languages.

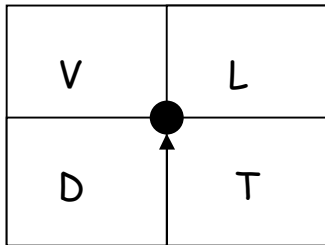


Another aspect of time is the realization that it is not endless. We have it in limited quantities. I have personally found that I make the best decisions by imagining myself at the end of my rope with but a short while to live. Looking back, I ask myself what I would do differently if I had the opportunity. Generally, if I follow that advice, I end up doing something wise. The realization that time is not endless, that it is a precious commodity, has a way of putting events into perspective. Death is the great equalizer and birth is the great lesson in humility and our own relative insignificance. In the long run we are all significantly insignificant. Time can give us a perspective.

Time is also something that one must learn to "buy and spend." There is an economy of time just as there is an economy of money. The impatient man must learn to wait, the patient person must learn to move, the distant person (ivory tower professor) must learn that distance is useful to think and contemplate but that distance never solves a problem. The person inclined to jump in and have a confrontation must learn to wait, to try to be effective. The family therapist must do all of these. He can jump into a family and activate anger, hatred, sadness, helplessness, tears and fury. If he overloads the circuits, he must wonder what happens when the family leaves his office. Again, my own personal experience is that I tend to jump in in my family and wait too long outside my family. I must learn to modify that.

## Summary of the Four Dimensions

So far we have covered the four dimensions of self. They include the elements in self, movement toward objects and people and time. Each of these dimensions occupies 25% of the self. The ideal self would have these four dimensions equally balanced with the center of self exactly in the middle. Finally, this concept is an individual one so far. To put it into a system, each self would have to be in balance with the other selves in his family system. A dimension in my self would be no more or less important than a dimension in the other person. My feelings and sense of time are in balance with yours.

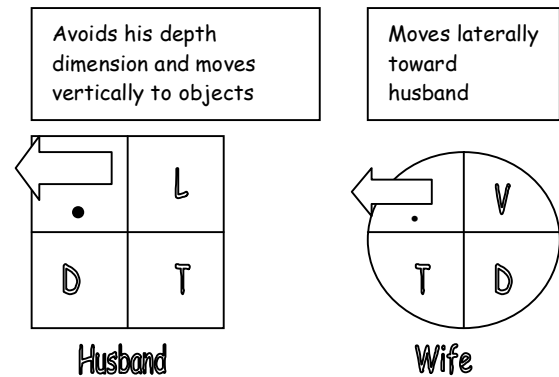


**Center of self**

## Clinical Examples

Let's take a typical picture of a family. Husband and wife appear in the office. Wife is full of herself, preoccupied with physical symptoms, full of her fears. Something is wrong with her and she wants help. Husband sits quietly, alternately comforting and then lecturing her. After awhile, it becomes clear that this is a pattern.

At this point we can track what is happening. Wife is plunged into her depth dimension. Husband is putting none of the elements of his own depth into the process. He moves laterally toward her so that his center of self actually lies in her. He is pure reaction and none of his own self, his own feelings and thoughts about himself is involved. The picture is out of balance. It dictates that he must learn to talk about himself. One can predict that he will do this with difficulty. If you ask him to talk about himself, he will ask: "What do you want to know?" It is difficult for him to talk about himself because he moves laterally toward her so much that his center of self lies in her. This does

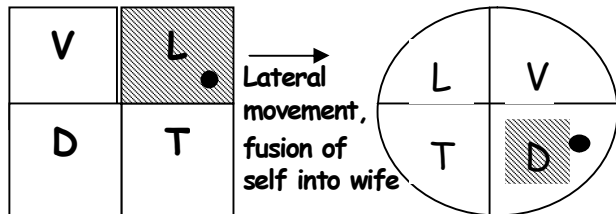


not help her because she is already self centered. It only increases her self centeredness and his own lack of self.

The move called for here is to get wife off of herself and talking about someone outside herself. The opposite is called for with the husband. He must learn to talk about himself, about his own depth dimension. One does this by asking her questions about what she thinks goes on inside of him. She doesn't know but begins to guess. Here her center of self moves from a preoccupation with her depth dimension and over-reacts so that she becomes preoccupied with her lateral dimension. Her bitterness and resentment toward him flow out. She is now centered laterally as he was a few moments before. Husband is struggling to talk about himself and begins to report what he does at work, how he spent all that day painting the house and then his gaze wanders toward objects in the room. Unable to mobilize his depth dimension, he moves vertically toward objects. This increases her fury.

In this picture we see the wife's center of self shift from the depth dimension to the lateral one and then into her husband. Unable to mobilize his own depth he makes a move vertically toward objects and the reporting of objects. It is the Murray Bowen two-step. The system is still out of balance but it is beginning to add up. As she moves toward him personally, he moves toward objects. It is safer.

If one asks him, "Is it safer that way?" and if one says to her, "It must be difficult to live with someone you don't know," they both will respond, "Yeah, you hit the nail on the head."

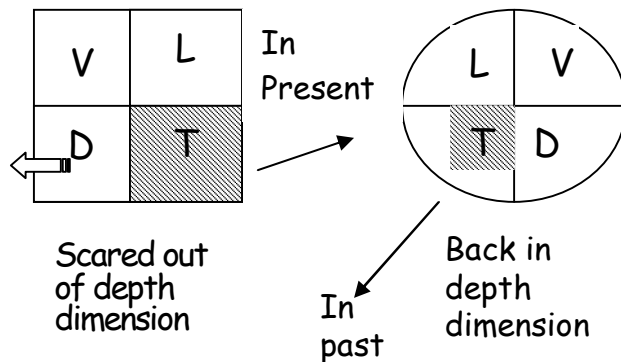


Husband with empty depth dimension

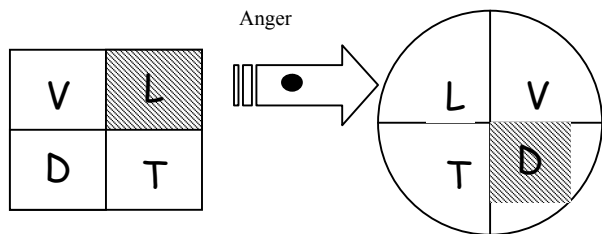
Wife with empty lateral dimension and centered in depth

Things are moving along. Change has occurred. There is still much anger and resentment in the picture but the positions of each member are different. At the moment, wife is moving toward husband and is less self-centered. Husband is retreating into object movement. This tells us that she must learn to move toward him in a more functional and useful way. He must learn to face her personally and laterally. He must get into touch with himself, with his depth dimension. I try to teach her how to move but she persists in her attack. I don't allow him to talk about objects and he begins to counterattack. The air is loaded with tension as they attack, counterattack, blame, accuse and defend.

**Center of self bounces like a ping pong ball from inside each one to between them**



The fourth dimension is time and mother is bogged down into the past. The bitterness there pulls her down into a swamp of hopelessness. Father is now with it, in the present and trying to make a move. They are in two different time frames. Movement in different time frames is neither heard nor listened to. Mother is back in her depth dimension and now father is moving laterally toward her. At this point, the family system can break, change or triangle to restore an unstable stability.



Angry meeting in lateral dimension

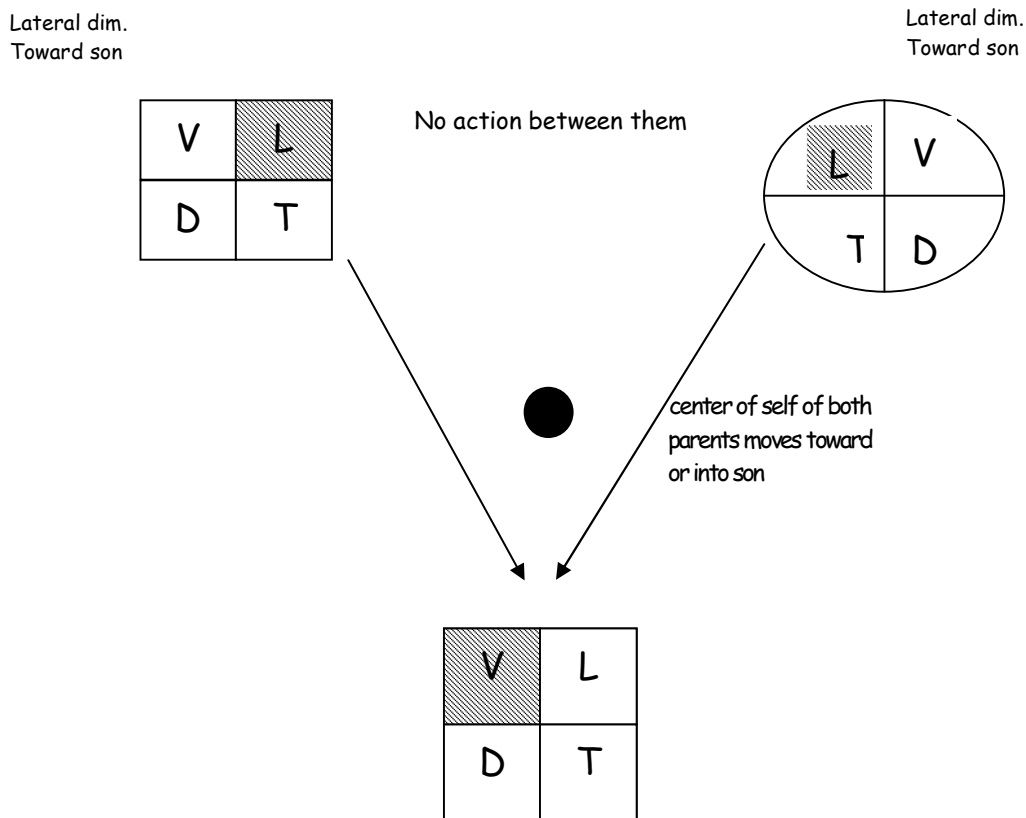
Father says; "Doc, there is something we haven't mentioned to you. We have a problem with our son and this may be a good time to mention it. We know that he has been fooling around with drugs but we suspect that he is on heroin. Mother and I are both worried about it." Mother perks up and says, "Yes, that's true and we

would do anything to help him."

At the moment, the system will not break or change. It will hold together by triangling. All members play a part. The personal heat between father and mother is cooled by focusing their attention on son. They get into a "We" position and the conflict between them is hidden. Son cooperates and participates in the process by cutting off his lateral dimension with his parents and moving vertically away from them toward the object — heroin. Now we have the triangle. This scenario could be played in reverse. The picture can be presented as a problem in child or parents, between any two or three members but all are

involved in the problem.

These examples represent but one way of using this structural concept. It can easily be expanded to include a study of how these dimensions tie into the concepts of balance, reciprocity, fusion, and triangulation. Consideration of how this can be done will be saved for future issues.



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