

MILDRED ANTONELLI

Family Resemblances and Individual Differences: Sullivan and Kohut

Exploring and elucidating the different perspectives and approaches within different theories and between theories is very important: to avoid becoming formulaic in our thinking and in our clinical work, to stimulate the critical and original thinking necessary if we are to truly help people, to allow for more fluidity, more input of ideas and technique—more creativity.

However I believe the prevailing emphasis on differences over similarities is ultimately counterproductive. It promotes a tendency to exclude what can be useful in differing views and perspectives. I think this approach needs to be balanced by an approach that emphasizes what Wittgenstein refers to as family resemblances: differing approaches to the same phenomena, or emphases on different phenomena, with more similarities than differences.

In this paper I will elaborate on the similarities between Interpersonal Theory and Self Psychology as members of the same family, while acknowledging the differences. The major similarity which defines them as members of the same family is their relation to and difference from drive theory. Both focus more on the formative and later relationships in which we become who we are. I will describe how their respective similar and different social, geographical, cultural and family environments led to their theoretical ideas and clinical approaches: and I will illustrate with clinical examples, in work with the same patient, how these significantly different approaches (or expressions of the same basic idea?) can be used together to enhance our clinical work.

Mildred Antonelli graduated in the '70's from a psychoanalytic institute that taught Interpersonal Theory, and then from IPSS in 2007. Over the course of her career she has been doing psychoanalytic psychotherapy with children of all ages, adolescents and adults and she has taught at the graduate and undergraduate level.