

The American Group Psychotherapy Association Interview with Amy and Arny Mindell, including 911.

This article was published in the February/March 2002 issue of *The Group Circle*.
http://www.agpa.org/pubs/GC_0202_individual.html

From Individual to World Work: An Interview with Amy and Arny Mindell

If you are interested in organizational consultation, don't miss keynote speakers Amy Mindell, PhD, and Arny Mindell, PhD. In their worldwide practice, the Mindells apply psychological ideas in diverse and unique ways at nearly all levels of human systems from the deeply personal to very large groups. Here, organizational consultant Dannielle Kennedy, PhD, CGP, talks with the Mindells about their far-ranging and creative work.

DK: Can you tell us about your model; what do you do, and how do you do it?

Both: We do what we call process-oriented psychology, which we developed in Europe. We call it "world work," and our philosophy, we call "deep democracy."

We create a setting in which all the rational ideas, as well as all the dreams and the deeper experience can come out. We'll meet with a group or an organization, everyone all at once, and we watch and work in the present. In Ireland, for example, we ran a meeting with terrorists and government people together. We meet with as many people as possible.

DK: What theories inform your work?

Both: We draw from all of our learning and experience, theoretical or otherwise. Taoism is probably the best way to answer that question. Our group process may include a thinking and spoken resolution or it is possible the group may dance it out as the case may be. We are open to all kinds of expression, the spoken and not spoken. These ideas help us find resolutions.

DK: Can you give an example?

A: On September 11, we were on the West coast with an international community with about 90 people. Everyone was shocked and upset about the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. We spent some time listening to their anger and feelings. We realized that the terrorists were like ghosts in the room, so we asked the group if they wanted to switch our agenda to the world scene.

We then had people act out various parts, either the terrorists or the victims. We encouraged people to stand on the sides or to come into the center of a large circle. We had this circle of 90 people, and in the center, two groups emerged with 5 to 20 people speaking on behalf of each side, the terrorists and the so-called victims. The terrorists were saying we want to kill you, maim you, and they were speaking in really high-pitched voices. We thought something might be important about that high pitch so we encouraged them to raise their pitch even higher. They revealed that their terrorist position was that we stand for something more important than life itself. Then they marched forward to bomb the USA side and the folks in the US looked frozen. We call that a "hot spot." The USA side was numbed out. We asked them what was down under the numbness and quietness. One woman surprised

everyone by saying, "Yes, we are a democracy and we have failed in some ways at being democratic but I think of the Statue of Liberty." Amy said, "For me she was an immigrant voice." The woman continued, "That statue means to me that today as an American the deepest dream I have is that we are open to everyone."

When she said that everyone just stopped. The tension broke and people started talking to each other in a friendly tone. The people on the USA side had thought they didn't have something as strong to stand for as the other side. Then this dream of democracy how we want to relate to the other side came through. The entire mood in the room was different and the possibility for conversation between the two sides was present.

DK: That sounds so powerful.

Both: Yes, we think this multi level approach gets at deep material. Sometimes the groups have trouble with this kind of expression, though. The style depends very much on the country and the style of the group we're working with. For example, many Japanese do not express strong feelings. We act it out for them as we do in classic psychodrama so that it still seems safe for them. Another time, a man in Bombay said, "These polarities you're talking about; this is a Western concept, conflict." We told him we'd be happy to drop the concept and simply talked with him about what is happening between Kashmir and India.

Sometimes we'll work in war zones or we'll work on diversity issues in parts of the US where danger is about to break out. We believe there is still hope even when things look difficult.

DK: Do you ever worry about issues of safety?

Both: Always. We sometimes have police present but so far no one has ever gotten a scratch. We use metal detectors. We've done some work with Palestinians and Israelis together here in the United States. We watch for hot spots, but if we hold that hot spot moment and really try and listen to the people, things don't escalate. It is quite safe.

Q: Do you also do interpersonal and inner work?

A: We have a school in Portland and we run special workshops and lecture in 30 cities around the world in which we train people in our style of individual work, group work, and large group work. These modalities are intertwined and linked. We emphasize dream and bodywork. We pay attention to the body symptoms people have in the here and now and then we work in groups with their problems.

DK: What do you do that helps people change?

Army: I take the job that Amy and I are doing as my own inner work first. I take conflicts as being representations of problems of my own. By the time I start to work with these folks on their issues, I have resolved these issues within myself.

DK: Do you work these issues in yourself out before you meet with the group or is it something that happens while you are with the group?

Army: Beforehand, if I can, but sometimes you don't have that much time.

Amy: I do many different things. I believe in the wisdom of people and the group. The group is not a mess or stupid; it has wisdom. The issue is whether we can follow it enough. We'll work on the group level, the outer systemic level, then on

relationships between people in the group and also on any aspect of my personal psychology that may be linked. I find the terrorist in me and the victim in me.

Arny: It is the inner work that makes the large group work more sustainable. If the folks don't do the inner stuff the outer changes don't bode well.

DK: The world I in which I consult, corporate America, is not that open to nontraditional ideas like these. How do you relate to such people?

Both: If we have a mainstream group, like the government, we'll more mainstream, rationally oriented work. If it is a psychologically sophisticated group, we'll do more of our non-traditional, body-, dream- and imagery work.

DK: How did you develop these ideas?

Arny: I was originally a Jungian analyst and a training analyst in Zurich in the 1970s. I wasn't enthusiastic about their group work in the Freudian model. A lot of these theories were useful and interesting but they were not developed with a community background. We needed to develop a different frame that captured the larger picture so we went to other models and Taoism and Quantum physics. Quantum physics is a concept that could fill volumes

DK: Is there a link between psychology and quantum physics?

Both: There are many links, but one that stands out is the concept of parallel worlds. As psychologists, we deal with parallel worlds all the time: the deep underlying feelings, dreams, and thoughts that are not part of everyday reality.

DK: How did you start this type of work?

Both: We wanted to find something that would work in a community kind of work. When we moved back to the US from Zurich, where there was so much evolution and action, we started doing more creative things.

Individual work is very important but people have to manage to live in the real world. The world is in great need of the things that group therapists know. AGPA could do so much with a political/psychological statement right now that would very much help.