

## USE OF THE MARSCHAK INTERACTION METHOD (MIM) IN FORENSIC EVALUATION

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I am a clinical psychologist in private practice specializing in the evaluation and treatment of victims and survivors of physical and sexual abuse. My clinical training is in psychodynamic theory and structural family therapy. I work with children, adolescents and adults. About half of my private practice consists of forensic work — court evaluations and expert-witness testimony. In dependency court where I do most of my work, the original petitions have been filed because of issues of child abuse and/or failure to provide for the special needs of emotionally disturbed children. Often these issues are tied to the parents' own emotional difficulties. These are some of the questions I am typically asked to address for the courts: Who should have custody? What is the capacity to parent? What supportive services are necessary for effective parenting? What are the individual personality dynamics of parents and children? What are the recommendations for individual and family therapy? The primary goal is to protect the child or children and if at all possible to keep the family together.

To those ends, I use the MIM to assess parenting capacity, family dynamics, and differential bonding/attachment between various caregivers and the children. The results of the MIM when combined with results of individual personality tests yield important information on personality dynamics of children and adolescents. I have found no other structured observational tool available which provides this richness of information. The fact that specific behavioral dimensions are targeted and expected on each MIM task has numerous advantages over free-play or in vivo home observation for court work. Like the TAT and Rorschach, there are "popular responses" on each task which the evaluator can expect to observe. In contrast to less structured means of

evaluating interaction, the evaluator, rather than the parent, controls task selection and thus the behavioral dimensions to be observed.

Because the families I assess are referred by the courts, and the results of the evaluation are used to determine disposition, there is pressure on parents to behave favorably. In order to answer the referral questions and to place the individuals at ease so that they become engaged by the tasks, I have found that modifying the standard administration procedure is helpful.

I modify the MIM procedure in one, and sometimes two ways. First, I always allow the participants to assume a comfortable position relative to one another and to move around the room at will. Typically, the adult and child sit on the floor, or alternately, the adult sits on the couch or chair and the child sits on the floor. This modification seems to reduce stress and make the participants more comfortable. As a result, there is opportunity for maximum flexibility in behavior (since it makes the situation more natural, more like free-play and less like "assessment"). The dimensions of the tasks presented seem little if at all affected by this change.

The second modification I often use is to administer the MIM to an entire family, rather than to a single child and adult. If there is more than one adult they are instructed to take turns on the tasks, or to participate together. This modification allows direct observation of family dynamics. It also allows for observation of bonding between siblings. While these modifications make observation and note taking more difficult, they provide for an increased richness of information.

In summary, modifying the MIM administration procedure increases the comfort level of court-referred participants and allows the evaluator to directly observe family dynamics and family roles, including sibling

bonding. It does not effect the dimensions of the individual tasks and thus the behaviors expected by task. Because the tasks are selected by the evaluator, based on the dimensions in question, the conclusions reached typically carry much more weight in the courtroom than do those based on observation situations where it is the caregiver who structures the free-play interaction.

### NEW MARITAL MIM WORKSHOP

April 12, 1992

Ann M. Jernberg, Ph.D. and Phyllis B. Booth, M.A. will present a one day workshop based on their book in process, *The Marital Interaction: Structured Observation and Intervention*.

Participants will learn to use the MMIM in the following situations: Partners contemplating long-term commitment, partners contemplating divorce or separation, couples in, about to enter, or terminate marital therapy, and couples considering parenthood.

Participants will learn to evaluate the following behaviors: Empathy, Respect, Nurturance, Connectedness, Cooperation, Balance, In-Syncness, Harmony, and Trust together with tolerance for Personal Space and for Individuality. All the above dimensions to be assessed in the context of View of Self, of Others and of the World.

Participants will learn to observe the four arenas of MMIM interaction (Climate, Pattern, Interaction with another, and Intrapsychic). Using videotaped MMIM's to focus on verbal and non-verbal behaviors, participants will learn to infer the unconscious needs in the relationship, to formulate hypotheses, to prepare the marital evaluation report, to provide feedback, and to conduct the intervention.

**Note:** This Introductory workshop is a prerequisite for the more intensive Intermediate MMIM workshop. See calendar on page 6.