

Interview with Mary Ann Glynn
MOC Distinguished Scholar 2017
February 5, 2018

Topic: MOC Division

You were one of the founding members of the MOC Interest Group. How did you first get involved?

MAG: As all innovations are, MOC was a child of the times...the times that mgt and org researchers started to take a serious interest in cognition. A cognitive turn was underway in our field that drew on the legacy of March & Simon, Karl Weick, and many others. I was in NY (doing my PhD at Columbia) and others at NYU – notably Bill Starbuck and Marlena Fiol – were catalyzing researchers to formalize a cognitive community.

Sounds like an exciting time. What inspired you about cognition research?

MAG: I was really curious as to how people engaged in work, and thought about it. I had worked for a bit before becoming a PhD student and observed that people had all different ways of engaging in work, and thinking about work. The field was taking the cognitive turn and that interested me a great deal. Back then it wasn't labeled yet, this was back in the late '80s, '90. And being in NY, Bill and Marlena were at NYU at the time so there was a whole NY ferment in the air, if you will. There were a bunch of people beginning to explore this and feeling like they didn't quite have a particular home at the Academy in the divisions. Although all of them were welcoming, but they wanted to create this more cross-disciplinary kind of group that people could engage in. And there was a lot of passion about it. It takes a lot of passion to found an interest group and eventually the division.

How has your research evolved over time as cognition related research has progressed?

MAG: Initially, I was interested in cognition, as it operated in people's heads; I primarily used lab experiments and surveys as research methods. Over time, though, I developed a deeper appreciation for how cognition is contextualized, how it occurs in naturalistic terms in social settings (as Selznick 1959 put it). I gravitated towards sociology, in order to deepen my approach to cognition.

As MOC evolved, how did you see your research evolve?

MAG: As I mentioned a little bit in the talk [Distinguished Scholar presentation], I felt a little bit like the Forrest Gump of MOC. There was always just a lot going on. And you live in those times, you feel those times, and you understand what was happening. Originally my work was more drawn from psychology. My dissertation was a lab study and manipulation of labels to see how people engaged in their task. After a while, I thought it was so powerful, just telling people words or labels, these were work and play, really caused them to engage different and act differently. So then I began wondering about the origins of those labels. How are they so consensual in society that we knew

what to do once we heard them? So I started to move away from an individual-centric kind of position to much more of a collective cultural approach.

What is your favorite article that you have authored?

From your perspective, what are the top 3 most significant impact articles that have shaped the direction of MOC related research?

MAG: Ah, this is like asking a parent to identify their “favorite” child from among their brood. I find it impossible...I like them all! You know the saying, there’s only one beautiful child in the world and every mother has it, it’s that kind of feeling. To single out three, might as well single out a hundred. There’s just so many.

In your path as you started out more in psychology and shifted toward a more sociological perspective, were there must read papers that informed that transition?

MAG: Karl Weick for sure. Because if you read him closely, I think people think he’s very individual-centric, but if you read *Social Psychology of Organizing*, it’s really a much more collective approach. How people come together, how they act on the same kinds of interpretations, and then what that means. So I would say that was hugely influential for me. And then recently over this year I’ve been teaching a doctoral seminar on org theory, and I decided to go back and read the classics. We all just read Martin Simon. And it’s like, 60 years ago they had it. They nailed it all. We think of them as being in individual decision making, bounded rationality, and all that, but they really specified how systems worked. And they acknowledge social components in what they were doing. In that way, I think a lot of what you read has it in there. The students were at first skeptical, like why are we reading all this old stuff? And then they got it.

If you had to describe what MOC’s identity is in a few words, what would they be? What do you see as our division’s core values?

MAG: To me, MOC’s identity is still about the study of how organizations, their members, and broader populations model reality and how it impacts action and choice. Values center on intellectual curiosity, openness to different kinds of scholarship (e.g., qual, quant, theoretical), rigor, and innovation. It’s about modeling reality and how you act on it.

You mentioned the openness to different kinds of scholarship. I’ve experienced that first hand as a qualitative researcher in the division. What do you think makes the division open to different kinds of methods and perspectives?

MAG: Maybe because it was younger, it was meant to be an in-between division group. In-between OB, OT, and Strategy, the big ones, and lots of others things like Entrepreneurship, Communication. I think that openness was there from the start. I think it wasn’t already defined by a particular body of theory or discipline-based approach. So OB more anchored in psych, OT more sociology, Strategy a bit of economics, but of other things too. So we didn’t have that. So I think there was from the start, the sense that

we want to explore cognition however we can. And as you say, a lot of qualitative people wound up gravitating to MOC. I think partly it's because of the social constructionist approach to it that there is no one reality out there, but how we all begin to think about it and model it. That's what I suspect.

What do you think differentiates MOC from divisions like OB?

MAG: Personally, I think it is the breadth of inquiry at MOC, which is evident in that 1) MOC, like cognition itself, is an interdisciplinary domain of study, 2) MOC is often multi-level, ranging from studying cognition at the individual, organizational and collective, category or industry levels, and 3) MOC leverages context meaningfully, by drilling down to understand phenomena.

I've noticed in the division that it's very developmental, which I've experienced as a differentiator. What do you think attracts very developmental scholars and reviewers to MOC?

MAG: I think we've always talked about it. When I was chair, I was following in a tradition that was established, we tried very hard to do that [be developmental]. I think it may have grown out of some of the early things we did, like Cognition in the Rough, which is still a hugely popular developmental workshop (imitated by many others I might add). I think that was part of it, and part of it was if we give good reviews, we might attract people to submit good papers to MOC. And thereby build a good program. I've really enjoyed people who have been an important part of MOC. I think there's a real esprit de corps, community-orientation of helpfulness or developmental attitude. I think it replicates itself over time when you get some good groups in there that try to make it happen.

MOC also has a large proportion of doctoral students, more than any other division. I think that may have also contributed to our developmental focus.

Topic: Managing a Successful Academic Career

You have been on the forefront of cognition related research. What do you think has contributed to your success?

MAG: Being able to interact with, and learn from, people far smarter than me, many of whom are part of MOC and AOM

What advice do you have for junior scholars? What do you wish you would have known as you were starting your career?

MAG: I wish I knew I'd last, survived [Laughs]. In the beginning of course, you always feel threatened. You feel like, oh gosh, I'll never make it. But I always tell my doctoral students that everybody's smart enough. Get over that one in a hurry. But not everybody's persistent enough. And in my view, persistence is a vastly underrated trait.

It's hard with 90% rejection rates at major journals, competitive program at the Academy, and all that, you're going to get a lot of rejections all along your career. So what differentiates people is not the rejection itself, but to keep moving. To keep the papers moving. To keep going. To have that kind of resilience that you can press on, but learn from it too. I think that's a really important thing to learn how to do it and learn from others.

How have you developed your networks across MOC and in the broader Academy?

MAG: Honestly, just showing up, being involved, and contributing all you can counts for a lot!

When you mentioned persistence, I thought about the importance of good coauthors and exciting research to work on together. What advice would you have for developing your coauthor networks?

MAG: I've worked with a lot of different coauthors and a lot of varied ones. Meaning they have different intellectual traditions. I have really enjoyed that. You know that old piece of advice about playing tennis. Play with people who are better than you and you'll learn. I really find that to be true. I didn't go out and consciously say I want to build a network. I took opportunities as they came along and as they interested me. So I would say it's really important to remember that these connections and relationships really have to be something substantive or have quality to them. In the sense that, you're not just trying to buddy up with someone who you think is maybe able to publish a paper or more senior or has some credentials that you'd like. Really see that there is a place where you can contribute and they as well. It sounds a little Pollyannish, I guess, but having those kinds of relationships they endure through today. The ones I made coming out of the gate. They're something to enjoy and savor too. They're not just instrumental, I've found, but they really become friends for life.

Who are the scholars that have most influenced your career?

MAG: Again, my parental identity is kicking in...

Anything else you'd like to add in terms of managing a successful academic career?

MAG: Just persistence to me always stands out. Taking critical constructive feedback is always hard, but learn to do it. Listen carefully and learn from it because it's totally invaluable.

It can be hard when you get back that harsh review!

MAG: It is, it is. You send in a paper because you think it's great, and it should be published. And then BAM! And of course you think, oh reviewers, what do they know. So you get it, you get angry. You stick it in a drawer for a week. Then you go back and look at it and you think, oh well, maybe they had a point. Or you get your colleagues or

other coauthors to look at it and say, well you know...more than once I looked at a review for a junior person and said, you know this really isn't that bad. I think you can address things here. So getting another perspective helps a lot.

Topic: Personal Fun Facts

What is your favorite activity to do during the weekend/holiday to relax and rejuvenate?

MAG: Spending time with friends and family; cooking and entertaining; watching great movies!

What kind of movies do you like?

MAG: I like mysteries. I like some historical things. I like comedies. I'm a cultural omnivore I guess. I don't like sci-fi that much.

Across your career, how have you carved out that time for yourself?

MAG: Oh, not well. You try to grab it however you can. My daughter was young at one point, you're either a mother or you were working. At some point, you just have to give yourself that time. Even if it's a little bit, just to escape the rest of it all. I don't have a plan like make sure Sunday mornings are yours or things like that. I've gone through different phases depending on what stage in life you are. I think if you don't plan for it you won't do it. This kind of profession seems to soak up every minute of every day.

I've heard people say things like, I need an hour a day, either at the beginning or end. Or some people say I need a day on the weekends as a different way. There's all kinds of ways of doing it. So I really think it depends on where you are in life, and how you work, and how you live. Finding some time really helps. Gives you perspective.

Where is your favorite vacation spot?

MAG: Cape Cod, MA. I love the beach. Sometimes I take a book, sometimes I take knitting, which I've found helps with stress, just calms you down. Nothing complicated, real simple, but those kinds of rhythmic things. Sometimes I just zone out.

What are your favorite Martha Stewart party tips or recipes?

MAG: My former students, Dan Halgin and Chris Marquis, offered a treasure trove of this in their hysterical introduction to my talk at the AOM. But I especially like this quote attributed to Martha Stewart:

"There is no single recipe for success. But there is one essential ingredient: Passion."

Martha Stewart. (n.d.). AZQuotes.com. Retrieved February 05, 2018, from AZQuotes.com Web site: <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/863531>

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

MAG: I'm just really grateful for the award. It's really nice to have the recognition and to celebrate. So thank you, I appreciate it.