Interview with Michael G. Pratt
MOC Distinguished Scholar 2016
Interviewer: Teresa Cardador

Cardador: Thanks for taking the time to sit down with me, and congratulations on winning the MOC Distinguished Scholar award. It is a pleasure to have the chance to interview you. I've come up with a list of questions with input from several of your former students. I'm going to ask about your experience in the MOC division, your academic career, and about some personal fun facts. Let's start with the MOC division. You've been a member of the MOC interest group for about 20 years, how did you first get involved?

MOC Division

Pratt: I don't actually remember the specifics but I do remember I started out like most people do. I started out volunteering to review and submitting papers. I was at University of Illinois at the time, and Joe Porac was greatly involved with the division and that may have helped. I do always think of MOC as the first division that I joined on my own. I didn't inherit from my advisors. I worked a lot with Jane Dutton working for OMT. I had done some stuff with ORM and OB before that. I think there was just some things about it early on that I resonated with. I liked the focus on cognition. It was small, it seemed kind of friendly. I started going to the division meetings and met people and they were great! It kind of snowballed from there.

Cardador: From what I understand, MOC started as an interest group because people thought cognition was left out. This coincided with the "cognitive turn." Well the cognitive turn has happened and cognition is all over the place. Is the turn complete?

Pratt: I don't think turns are really ever complete. I see them more as spirals than turns. Things always become the forefront because they are a reaction to something else. In psychology cognition became big because there was an overemphasis on behaviors. Behaviors, feelings, actions, symbols, all those things keep swirling around because we're in a complex field. Things come back. Cognition is now infused in everything. Absolutely. But you also see now we're talking about practice turns and material turns, so we're going back to behaviors, we're going back to physical artifacts but viewing them in new ways. When I looked at artifacts, my colleagues and I saw them as relatively distinct from other elements of organizing – not in terms of sociomateriality. Some could even argue that the new emphasis we're seeing regarding the resurgence in culture now is a new way to look at cognition. I tend to think that we're in a complex field and things just kind of ebb and flow. It's not like we never talked about cognition before the cognition turn. My guess is cognition will always be around, but its emphasis or de-emphasis is kind of a natural rhythm of the field.

Cardador: Related to concepts swirling around, given that many of the core topics of the MOC are now covered in other divisions, what do you think is unique about MOC?

Pratt: I think one thing that is very unique about MOC is its service orientation. Part of what our reason for being is helping other people. Even in our new byline "we'll help you think it

through" is all about helping people develop ideas, helping people develop who they are as a scholar. I think that's pretty unique. The other thing I think is pretty central about MOC is that by focusing on cognitions we're not really focusing on the levels of analysis. So we tend to see OB primarily as interested primarily in more micro, psychological topics and phenomena. OMT is more macro. By focusing on cognition, we can ask more cross-level questions. If you look at the people who join MOC, we get them from all over -- from the most micro to the most macro. I think it's because cognition doesn't know a level of analysis and I think that's pretty powerful.

Cardador: If you had to describe what MOC's identity is in a few words, what would they be? What do you see core and distinctive about MOC?

Pratt: I would say Community, Service, Developmental, and Innovative. For the community part, what I love about MOC is when I go to the business meetings people are just friendly. A lot of people tend to know each other. It's bigger than people think it is -- I always consider MOC as a small division though it's probably closer to medium size. But it's kept a very small-feel, and I love that. The service orientation I've talked about before. With all the various "in the roughs" we have now. Starting with Cognition in the Rough and now we have Diamonds in the Rough, Presenting in the Rough and Teaching in the Rough. For developmental, I'm always impressed with the quality of feedback that at least I've gotten, and I've heard other people get, from MOC. We have very developmental reviewers. I've been doing "reviewing in the rough" now for more years than I want to say, and the whole purpose is to help people become better reviewers. It's a very, very developmental way of approaching things -- not a "wow you're really stupid for not knowing this" way. It's more "here's what we've gotta do to get your paper where you want it to be". And then with innovative, what I really like about MOC is that it's super innovative. People aren't afraid of change. Spencer Harrison came on board and changed the logo and byline. That seems like a small thing but a lot of divisions never really think about changing their byline. On a deeper level, we experiment. We were the first division that tried not to give away little trinkets every year, but rather to use the money to contribute to charities. Actually I think we got in trouble with the Academy for that, but the fact that we're willing to try different things is important. And we try different sessions, and I think they're spreading! I noticed that OB now has something pretty similar to Cognition in the Rough. We're innovative and I think people pick up on that.

Cardador: Recent innovations such as the Tuesday Coolness and the MOC Hack-a-thon also seem pretty unique to MOC.

Pratt: Yeah - absolutely.

Cardador: You said something that I want to delve a little deeper into. I frequently hear people say that the MOC division is very developmental and I've personally experienced that. What do you think it is that attracts such developmental scholars and reviewers to MOC?

Pratt: I think a large part is that the leadership of MOC models it. MOC has now gained a reputation so I think people that become who are attracted to the division are people who are also developmental and like-minded. [Go ASA model!] And I think it just grows and just builds on itself.

Academic Career

Cardador: You have been at the forefront of identity-related and qualitative research, and have been recognized in both of those areas for your scholarship. Do you have any thoughts on what has contributed to your productivity and success?

Pratt: First, thanks for the compliment. You know, I think it's a combination of luck, hard work, and great colleagues. You can't succeed in this field without working hard, but that's only one thing. As hard as we like to work, luck is always involved, and I think I've been fortunate in a variety of ways. For example, I hit identity when identity was really coming on the scene. The other thing that we can't ignore is the importance of great colleagues. No one really does this job entirely on their own. If you think about the kind of research I do and the kind of research you do, we talk to people. So that means -- at minimum -- we need other people to cooperate and to talk with us. We also need others to bounce ideas off of, to read drafts, all those things. Awards go to individuals but they're probably better attributed to someone's groups and communities. And the other thing I was thinking related to luck is that -- for better or for worse -- identity seems to be at the forefront of a lot of issues and challenges that we face today. For example, identity conflicts between democrats and republicans, or thinking about identity in a gig-economy. Identity is something that has a lot of staying-power. I was fortunate in graduate school to be introduced to it, and to be introduced to people who are thinking about it.

Cardador: Academics are often defined by their expertise. Qualitative researchers can often go in directions not directly related to their expertise. Can you offer lessons about how to manage one's scholarly identity as an inductive researcher?

Pratt: Absolutely. I experience that all the time. I just recently finished a paper on trust. That certainly was out of my wheelhouse in terms of expertise! To manage an inductive career, I think you really need to be cognizant of the questions you ask, and what core questions drive you. There's just not that many core questions in the field. I think people tend to gravitate towards a certain set. My work has looked at identity, but also ambivalence, commitment, faith, trust, meaningful work, intuition, and more. These topics tend to really center around the core question of "how do people connect to their work, to their colleagues, their occupations?" There are other people who are really interested in the question of how do you create order out of chaos and vice versa. Those people are interested in routines, scripts and sense-making - but also innovations, creativity, breaking the status quo, and organizational change. So I think if you're going to do inductive research it's important to have an inner compass. And an inner compass in part is knowing what core questions really drive you. And I think that helps you stay centered even though you're working with a dizzying number of theories. You may have to go down a variety of paths. The article I just talked about started out as a paper about intuition and meaningful work, but the final paper is about faith -- and leaps of faith -- in the trust process. That was a long, winding, and ultimately fortuitous journey. You kind of go where the data goes. But at the same time, the heart of it is still answering some of the core fundamental questions that I'm interested in.

Cardador: In thinking about your body of work, there are quite a few papers that I can think of that define you and that people might think of when they think of Mike Pratt. What's the paper that you're most proud of?

Pratt: (Laughs) So you know I could not possibly answer that question. It'd be like asking me which one of my kids is my favorite kid. There are a few that stand out for different reasons. They are all special in their own way. The Amway piece (*ASQ*, 2000) was my first major paper, so in some ways that will always be special to me. It also taught me a lot of lessons about the field. When I was writing the paper, I had originally organized it around this two-by-two of different kinds of attachment: positive, negative, ambivalent, and lack of attachment. Unfortunately, about two or three months before I was about to publish it I was scooped by another set of scholars who came up with a very similar typology. That forced me to re-work everything and it caused me to really look at it in a processual way. That was great, I think it actually helped the paper a lot. It was a lot better paper than before. I think the dynamic still holds up pretty well. And then, I did a paper on ideological fortresses (*Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies,* 2000) that for me is the paper I like the most but is read the least. Another would probably be the intuition paper (AMR, 2007), and working with Eric Dane and trying to figure out how to theorize about that. I have been interested in non-conscious processes for a long time, but didn't quite know how to talk about them. Intuition was a great way to do that. And the last one would be this one about trust I just talked. When it started out, it was in Illinois. I was working with Eric Dane and it started out as a qualitative study on intuition. We had interesting data, but it wasn't quite there. We restarted the project at Boston College with Doug Lepisto. I think between original data collection and getting the final paper was probably over ten years. So that one is special for because it is a "being persistent" paper.

Cardador: You've been recognized as a distinguished scholar by our division, you've been named a chaired professor, you're an associate editor. You have earned many accolades. What are your ambitions for the future?

Pratt: That's an interesting question. Part of it is that I don't see my career in that way. I didn't set out to be distinguished scholar. I didn't set out to be any of those things you mentioned and so to me they kind of came along because I really love what I do. I try to do interesting research and I have been lucky enough to be recognized for it. It's kind of like tenure. Tenure was never my ultimate goal, I was just hoping to get it by doing what I did. I think if you see your career as a variety of points to get to, like first I got to get tenure, then I got to get full, then I got to get chair, at some point those things run out, and if that's your fuel then you're going to have a pretty empty tank before too long. Other than that, I've taken the opportunities like the editorship when they come around. I try to do new things that stretch me and try to find things to best utilize my talents for the field. So, I don't really have any ambitions for the future, in that sense. I would love to be able to continue to do good research. The further along you get in this profession the more you're asked to do other things that are not research, and I struggle to continue to do that. So in a general level, that's my ambition. I also want to write a book. That's on my bucket list, but it's really about doing the best job that I can and not so much achieving some kind of marker or something.

Cardador: Is there anything you would change about the field if you could just simply wave a magic wand and make that change?

Pratt: I think one big thing - this is what I talked about when I gave my MOC Distinguished Scholar talk - is that I really wish we thought about this field in a fundamentally different way. We tend to divide ourselves by level of analysis or by discipline. Given that we have such a special place between practice and theory, business and academics, I would really love for us to focus or organize ourselves around problems. I've mentioned before there are really only a few core problems. How cool would it be to have somebody organize a department around making chaos out of order? You put creativity researchers with destructive technology people with organizational change people and wow! What kind of new insights could you get out of it? It would allow us to delve deeper into problems and it would help us to come up with more robust solutions. It would be not only theoretically richer, but also more practical.

Cardador: That makes so much sense. So switching gears a bit, I know a lot of your research is done with various occupations and professions. I don't know if you've ever been asked this, but is there a job or profession you would have been inclined to pursue if you weren't an academic?

Pratt: Well, I have a couple of answers to that. Based on my research I would have been an orthopedic surgeon. They tend to be super happy. They can make a very profound impact on the quality of someone's live without high mortality rates and I think that is pretty cool. I daydream about being a writer. That's what I do anyway, but maybe a sci-fi or fantasy writer would be pretty fun. People have joked that I should write Hallmark cards but I don't think that's where I want to go. I have a third answer but I think you are going to ask me about it later.

Cardador: Indeed! I know as a former student that you spend a significant amount of time mentoring students and others in the field. Why do you think mentoring is so important in building a successful academic career?

Pratt: Taking a step back, so much of what we do in our profession relies on the goodwill of others. On volunteering stuff. So whether it's reviewing or editing, -- and I think in a large degree mentoring -- it's stuff that people do because they want to do it. And I want to put that out there because I do think mentoring is more effective when it's a choice than if you feel that you have to do it. I think it's innately important. I think it's the right thing to do. People tend to focus, especially early on in your career and rightfully so, they tend to think about their own research. Maybe as you move along you think more about your field, like your particular area. But so few people think about the field as a whole, and I think it's really important to mentor students because that's the future of our field. More personally, I think it is important for a successful career – at least how I see success. I think one of the things I'm most proud of is that every student whose dissertation I've chaired at UIUC has gotten tenure. In fact, the first student I ever mentored all the way through the entire process just got full professor. So that's kind of cool. So that to me is a measure of success. Just to be clear though, people getting tenure is their hard work not mine. But it does make me happy nonetheless. And then, there's sort of a pragmatic reason for mentoring as well. You learn a ton by teaching other people, and you can get terrific co-authors and friends. You may even be lucky to get interviewed by them one day! I think that's a terrific bonus.

Cardador: (laughs) I'm glad you think so. Another role I know you spend a lot of time investing in is editing. What do you like the best about being an associate editor and who would you recommend the role to?

Pratt: That's a great question. I wish more people did it. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to get people to take editorships. I think developing papers is the best. It's both creative and developmental. It's wonderful to see an idea come to life, especially when it's pretty rough and not articulated well at first. Unfortunately, the worst part of the job is writing rejection letters. Even if I have to write rejection letters, my goal to make sure that the person or people are better off having been through this review process than if they had not. I'm always surprised how many people email me after a negative review saying "I didn't like the result. but thank you so much for helping me make the paper better". So developing papers sometimes leads to a publication in my journal and sometimes it leads to the authors to getting a publication in another journal. And to me that's fine! Again, for the field it's important, and for the people you're doing it for it's important. Who would I recommend this to? I think if you're good at helping people develop their ideas, I would say you would be perfect. Especially if you're developmental in doing it. The other reason why you may want to be an editor – and this is something that attracted me when I first started – is because you want to make some change. For me, it was really to make qualitative research more legitimate. Working at AMJ and becoming a qualitative editor in particular helped in starting that process. Now they've gone on have multiple qualitative editors. I think it's also important to have a purpose behind it, some other reason for doing it. The reason not to do it is for status. I think some people want to do it because "Oh! Wouldn't this be great, I'll be editor and people will come and talk with me". I think you ought to be careful with that. The status is fleeting. I know people who've been editors who have said "I was at the Academy and everybody would talk to me and then I wasn't and editor and then nobody would talk to me." So it's pretty fleeting. So if you're good at making ideas stronger and if you have a bigger reason to do it, then you definitely should. I think it's phenomenal, and I think it helps the field. And again, it's pragmatic. I know I'm a better thinker and writer because I've done editing.

Cardador: We've established through our conversation that you wear many hats and have a lot of roles within the field. How do you maintain your passion for research despite the significant workload that you have?

Pratt: A few things. One is, I think in anything you have to be really organized. If you know me, you know I have a whiteboard that maps out what I'm doing, what is due and when. I have a list of monthly tasks that happen. This month is pretty good, my list only has 17 things that need to be done by the end of the month! It helps me to see what I need to do. And then I can organize - "Oh I have ten minutes!" I'll look at my list, and see what I can do in that time. So that's one thing. That doesn't keep me passionate though. I think what keeps me passionate is simply finding really fun and important research questions to answer and working with really cool people. I think if I didn't have those two, the passion would be gone. If you're writing simply to get a requisite number of A's or something...once you get that something, why are you doing this? The other thing I've learned is that it's important, when you're doing service jobs especially -- and even teaching to some degree -- to do things that you want to do. Because if you don't pick what you want to do then you're going to essentially be chosen to do stuff you probably

don't want to do! So for me I direct the PhD program because I'm passionate about student development. But if I wasn't doing the PhD program, I would probably get dumped with a lot of things that I wasn't so passionate about and I can easily see how that would wear at me.

Personal Fun Facts

Cardador: What are your favorite activities – during the week, or on a weekend a holiday – to relax and rejuvenate?

Pratt:
During the weekday, working out is critical. I find working out at least three times a week keeps me going, physically and also it's a great stress reliever. On weekends and holidays, sometimes mix a new drink or find a cool craft beer or a new beer. That's one way. I also coach soccer on the weekends. Which is somewhat relaxing, depending on the season (laughs). But it's different, it uses a different part of your brain which is kind of great. On vacation, I actually do fun reading, usually Sci-fi or fantasy. I like to complete things and I have a hard time chipping away at a book over the course of a year. I like reading especially pleasure books in a smaller number of sittings, and so I will do that on vacation. That's a nice escape thing.

Cardador: Over the course of your career how have you consciously carved out time for you and your family?

Pratt: I think I've gotten much better over the years at really creating and becoming good about boundary setting. So first of all, I don't sleep a lot. So that helps. (laughs). I have a longer day than some. I'm usually up, depending on the day by about 5 or 6 in the morning and I'm not in bed until 10 or 11 at night. So it tends to be a relatively long day. But I do schedule maybe 12 hours out of the house a day during the weekdays and that time is pretty much all work time. When I'm home, I'm all-in at home. I do the evening routines rather than the morning routines. I coach my kids in sports, I try to be all-in as a parent when I'm home. I don't work weekends anymore if I can help it, and I don't work nights. When I'm in the office, I crank things out during the day. It's a long day but I get a lot of stuff done. But when possible I leave that here. I don't really like the balance metaphor, taking one to be the other. I try to be all-in in both. But to do that you really have to be pretty careful with your time and how you spend it.

Cardador: I know you and your family have taken pretty good trips. What's your favorite vacation spot or the most exotic trip you've ever taken?

Pratt: For favorite, I love anything with the beach, sun, and warm weather. So Australia was remarkable. We've been to Mexico several times. I spend a fair amount of time in Poland and the Netherlands because these are comfortable places and I love the people. Let's see, in terms of exotic, probably Paraguay. My family and I went to South America. We did go to some more popular spots in South America, but Paraguay was probably the most exotic in terms of off-the-grid stuff, little dirt roads, lots of driving around. The placed we went to were pretty underdeveloped. I loved the culture. I just loved meeting new people and seeing new sights. I enjoyed it quite a bit. I recently went to Barcelona, and got to take my only daughter, with me, so that was special.

Cardador: So you mentioned earlier that one of the ways that you relax is by mixing up a new drink. I know that you're a mixologist and I heard that you recently earned your bartending license. How did you get into that, and what's your favorite drink to make?

Pratt: I got into it in graduate school. I was in a psych program with not a lot of money for entertainment. I happened to have a rented apartment in a house that had a porch. On Fridays, I would gather five bucks or so from each of the doctoral students, and I'd go to the liquor store. I'd make some weird cocktail and we'd order pizza. It was called Drink of the Week. I remember my most unusual drink was a Green Iguana. That's what got me started, and I've just kind of continued with it since then. In terms of favorite drink, I'm probably best known in my social circles for my margaritas. My recipe has traveled far and wide. But now that I've done this bartending certificate, I really can make a decent Long Island Iced Tea -- and there's a drink that's really similar to that called the Grateful Dead. After the class, I am better able to get the proportions right – and I learned some secret things as well -- to make the drink actually taste like an iced tea. That was a lot of fun.

Cardador: Is your margarita recipe a secret recipe?

Pratt: (laughs) Not particularly. First of all I don't use a mix. It's mostly in the ratio. I tend to use a silver tequila, and I tend to use a 3-2-1 ratio. 3 parts tequila, 2 parts lime juice, and 1 part triple sec.

Cardador: What personal accomplishment would you say you're the most proud of?

Pratt: Probably being married for over 20 years and having 3 teenagers who at least right now appear to be happy and thriving. That to me is what I'm most proud of.

Cardador: That's definitely something to be proud of! Is there anything else that you else you would like to share before we wrap up?

Pratt: Yeah, I would like to make a call to for people to get involved in the profession, to volunteer. Whether it's reviewing, or ultimately editing or mentoring. All these things are super important. You can't run or be a profession without them. In every group, this type of work becomes disproportionate among a small number. I think it'd be great if we just had more people getting involved. I think our profession would be so much richer. I think people don't know how to get involved. If you want to review for a journal, start reviewing for the academy first -- that's the way you start. If you're at a place with doctoral students mentor them if you can. If you're not, you can be an external reviewer or just help people by answering questions. When a doctoral student emails you, don't ignore it.

The other thing I want to end on is thanking people for the honor. Recognitions are really not achieved by individuals alone. Community is key, and that's one of the things I love about MOC.

Cardador: Mike, this has been really fun. Thank you so much for talking with me.

Pratt: No, thank you! My pleasure.