Margaret McLaughlin, Editor, *Communication Monographs*, 1987-1989

By Wendy Samter

With over 45 publications to her credit, Margaret McLaughlin is one of the communications field's most productive scholars. But even more importantly, McLaughlin's research has brought to light many key issues for students of interpersonal communication. For example, her systematic study of persuasive episodes illumines for us the importance of considering situational features when analyzing any communicative episode. Her rigorous study of accounts teaches us many lessons about the strategies through which actors seek to manage communicative failures and the effects these strategies have on social evaluations. Her work on conversation synthesizes disparate bodies of literature and provides a clear and detailed picture of the mechanisms that organize everyday conversation.

Remarkably, McLaughlin's contribution to the field does not end with her scholarship. She has been elected to several offices in national and interpersonal organizations and is editing (or has edited) a number of prestigious journals. In these capacities, she has shaped the body of knowledge we have accrued as a discipline as well as the direction in which we are currently heading.

Family Background

Margaret McLaughlin was born on December 26, 1943 at Georgetown Hospital in Washington, D.C. At the time, her father, Dr. Edward Savage, was a lieutenant commander in naval intelligence assigned to decipher the Japanese code. After her birth, the family moved—first to Cornell ad then to the University of Mississippi where Savage worked as a professor of English until his death in 1972. Although McLaughlin's mother, Mary Johnston Savage, earned several credits toward a Master's degree and briefly taught high school history, she chose to work inside the home for most of her adult life. McLaughlin does not have any living siblings; her only sister, Katherine, was born with Down's Syndrome and died when she was 18 months old.

In many ways, it was inevitable the McLaughlin became a college professor. During her childhood, the university was her second home; she spent many hours on campus taking classes, going to the library, and "hanging out" in her father's office. Everyone in the family was an avid reader, and, according to McLaughlin, it was not uncommon to find the three of them huddled together each with "noses stuck in a separate book." In addition, McLaughlin's parents came from families that emphasized education; of four grandparents, three were college graduates. Her mother's family were bankers and businessmen. Her father was the first in several generations not to enter the ministry.

McLaughlin dedicated her first book, *Conversation: How to Talk Is Organized* (1984), to the memory of her father who was a prolific scholar of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. During his career, Savage edited a journal called *Studies in English* and published several articles, although he did not write his first book until he was well into his sixties. As McLaughlin explains in her acknowledgements of *Conversation,* "When I asked him why he had waited so long to write a book, his reply was that up until then, he hadn't known enough to fill up that many

pages." Savage was awarded several grants and fellowships that took the family to what McLaughlin recalls seemed like exotic and glamorous places to a "small town girl." The family spent on summer in London where her father had won a grant to research a book at the British Museum and another in Los Angeles when he was named a fellow at the Huntingdon Library. Savage's scholarship alos earned him a coveted appointment to the Committee on the 400th Anniversary of Shakespeare's Birth. When invited to attend a reception at the White House, Savage refused because he disagreed with Lyndon Johnson's politics. As McLaughlin lovingly notes, "I'm not sure mother ever forgave him for that."

The value her family placed on education, the comfort and familiarity she felt with the university setting, the vicarious excitement she experienced because of her father's research, and her love of reading made higher education an obvious choice for McLaughlin. Both McLaughlin and her parents always expected her to attend college, although everyone was somewhat surprised when she did not settle into a "more conventional lifestyle" after earning her Bachelor's degree.

Primary, Secondary, and Undergraduate Education

McLaughlin attended public schools and state universities. She does not remember much about elementary school "except for recess and throwing food in the lunchroom." As for her years in junior high school, she recalls being somewhat less than a model child. "In seventh grade, I was expelled for writing on the walls of the girl's room with lipstick. I cut class quite a bit and didn't study very hard." While formal education may not have been McLaughlin's strong suit throughout childhood, it was during this time that her love of reading developed. The family lived on the edge of town, so McLaughlin had few opportunities to play with other children. Thus, books and short stories were her after-school companions for much of childhood. By the time she began high school, however, McLaughlin's social side blossomed. She became active in several clubs, played in the band, and discovered boys.

It was not until she entered the University of Mississippi that McLaughlin felt at all inspired or challenged by formal academic pursuits. She ultimately graduated cum laude but had some "memorable" semesters along the way. In on semester, she obtained five A's and an F in psychology; she made C's and D's in math courses, and excelled in physical education classes, earning A's in archery and bait and fly casting.

McLaughlin soon discovered that she loved making speeches and working at the university's radio station. She also loved literature. So, instead of loading up on electives, McLaughlin took a triple major to accommodate her interests in French, English literature, and speech. Throughout her college career, McLaughlin earned many honors including an award form the French government for her work in the department and a trip to the National Association of Broadcasting Conference in New York where Pauline Frederick was the keynote speaker. In addition, she was Phi Kappa Phi, Mortar Board, president of her sorority, and very involved in campus life.

Although her college days were filled mostly with socializing and studying, "real life" did impinge in one very significant way. McLaughlin was in her sophomore year when the University of Mississippi was integrated with admission of James Meredith. As she remembers, The rioting and the murder, which was committed right behind my dormitory, had a very sobering effect on all of us. Some of the students did not return. Those of us who stayed went back to classes still filled with the stinging fumes of tear gas. The Federal Troops who were there for weeks were in effect an occupying army; my mother still has a copy of the "pass" for

traveled around campus that she was issued. I still have the pictures, taken by a military photographer, of a dinner with the troops which I attended as a student government officer. McLaughlin Maintains that the events surrounding the desegregation did not radically alter her political views, mostly because she did not have any to speak of at that time. They did, however, bring to the surface for her the ugliest aspects of racism, a phenomenon with which she had little previous experience.

In her senior year, McLaughlin applied to graduate programs in French and speech. She received assistantships in both areas, but ultimately chose to accept an offer from the University of Illinois in speech.

I accepted one of the offers in Speech for what in retrospect was not a very good reason—I didn't think my French was good enough for me to handle a class in it. I would like to say I was forward-looking enough at the age of 21 to realize that foreign languages would enter a period of decline, and communication a period of growth. But that wasn't it.

Graduate Education

In the summer of 1965, McLaughlin moved to Champaign-Urbana where she remained for the next two years. After obtaining a master's degree emphasizing rhetoric, McLaughlin took a two-year hiatus from graduate studies and moved to New York. There she worked as a "Girl Friday" for Radio News International and an instructor at Hunter College. In 1967 she returned to Illinois to resume work on her doctorate. By that time, Karl Wallace, who was, in her words, "a brilliant rhetorician and kindly mentor," had left the university and McLaughlin found herself most excited by courses she took from Tom Scheidel and Ruth Anne Clark—both of whom were considered "of the empirical persuasion as it was called back then." As McLaughlin explains, "I took their classes and felt right at home—perhaps because I discovered I could do well in thinks like social science and statistics, in which I had performed so poorly as an undergraduate."

McLaughlin's dissertation, directed by Roger Nebergall (who studied with the famous Sherifs), was a multidimensional scaling analysis of a popular social judgment instrument. She claims that even her professors thought it was "unutterably boring"; yet it did demonstrate that the claims of intervality made by the authors of the scale were invalid. McLaughlin obtained her Ph.D. in 1972, officially majoring in speech and minoring in psychology and communication. For McLaughlin, the most rewarding part of graduate school was the intellectual excitement generated by the "wonderful library, computer center, and stimulating faculty" she encountered at the University of Illinois. McLaughlin lived in "a constant state of intellectual euphoria," staying up to all hours of the night writing what she then regarded as "unspeakably brilliant papers."

Career Development

In spite of excellent letters of recommendation, a high grade point average, and a single-authored paper in the field's leading journal, McLaughlin could not find a job her first year on the market. Unfortunately, universities were just one of many contexts in which sexist attitudes predominated during the early 1970s, and McLaughlin encountered several instances of discrimination.

In one interview, the first question posed to her was, "What does your husband do?" Similarly, in response to a letter of recommendation Nebergall had written on McLaughlin's behalf, the chair of a department advertising four assistant professorships wrote, "If we should need a good woman this year, we'll be sure to take a look at her." On another occasion McLaughlin learned

she had not been offered a position because "any woman who would apply for a job without her husband's having on first had to be emotionally unstable." At the time, McLaughlin and her husband had a 2-year-old son to support. In desperation, she sought employment at a social service agency. Her interviewer, a woman, refused to consider her for the position because, in her experiences, "a woman with children could not be counted on in the workplace."
"If my undergraduate career had led me to believed that there was nothing I couldn't do," recalls McLaughlin, "then my years in graduate school, and my experience trying to get a job, led me to wonder what I would be allowed to do." Finally, she and her husband were offered positions at Texas Tech University (TTU). In 1976 she received tenure and was promoted to associate professor. McLaughlin, remembers TTU as an "ideal first position" where she had wonderful colleagues, free run of the library, a good computer center, and elaborate research facilities. During her employment there, one survey ranked the department as having the most prolific publishers per capita of any graduate program in communication.

In 1982 McLaughlin accepted an offer from The Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California (USC), where she is presently a full professor. The decision to move to USC was difficult because of the affinity McLaughlin had developed for her colleagues at Texas Tech and because the "big city" of Los Angeles loomed as a large and scary place for someone who had spent most of her adult life in small towns.

Major Contributions and Achievements

McLaughlin's contributions to the field of communication are manifold. Although she has published on a variety of topics, she is perhaps best known for two lines of research: her work on situation influences in compliance-gaining contexts and her studies of accounts. Throughout the 1980s, McLaughlin and co-author Michael Cody conducted a series of investigations designed to examine the structure underlying perceptions of persuasive episodes (e.g., Cody & McLaughlin, 1908, 1985a; Cody, McLaughlin, & Schneider, 1981; McLaughlin, Cody, & Robey 1980). Across these studies, subjects' ratings of common compliance-gaining situations (e.g., persuading a boy/girlfriend to confide in you more, persuading a professor that an answer on a test is incorrect) indicated that different dimensions did, in fact, underlie different situations. In other words, McLaughlin and Cody found that "the who" and "what" components of settings for behavior influence perceptions of situations (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985a, p. 287). This line of work highlighted the need for researchers to pay careful attention to the multiple dimensions actors use when forming impressions of and responding to persuasive episodes. McLaughlin and Cody were also among the first in the field to study the accounts people employ when attempting to manage communicative failures (or potential failures). McLaughlin initially became interested in accounts after she read Scott and Lyman's (1986) landmark piece in which they drew an important distinction between excuses (where actors admit failure but deny responsibility) and justifications (where actors accept responsibility but maintain it was not untoward). Since that time, she and Cody have engaged in a systematic and rigorous research program exploring how accounts are offered and judged.

For example, they have examined the level of credibility associated with different types of accounts (e.g., Cody & McLaughlin, 1988), the sequencing of account episodes (e.g., Cody & McLaughlin 1985b; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983), the affective reciprocity of accounts (e.g., McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983), contextual determinants of accounting events (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983), the effectiveness of accounts (McLaughlin, Cody, & French, 1990), and the accounts people offer when they fail to follow another's advice (e.g., McLaughlin, Cody, Dickerson, & Manusov, 1992). Their research has investigated the use of accounts across a variety of populations (e.g., college students, "real-world" people) and

contexts (e.g., interpersonal settings, traffic courts). This body of work has not only served to highlight the importance and complex nature of the "verbal devices" individuals use to "neutralize negative evaluations" (Cody & McLaughlin, 1990, p. 230), but has also stimulated interest in communicative failures, a topic that is now one of the most highly researched in the field.
In addition to these lines of research, McLaughlin is also the author of *Conversation: How Talk Is Organized* (1984). The book was among the first to provide a cogent synthesis of conversational studies conducted by scholars in a wide variety of academic disciplines. As such, it represents a significant step in our understanding of the mechanisms through which conversations are organized. The book addresses many questions, including how and why simultaneous talk occurs, the rules we use in conversation, ways of signaling topic change, and the sequencing of conversational openings and closings. As Mark Knapp (1984, p. 10) commented in his foreword to the book, In my opinion, *Conversation: How Talk Is Organized* is a useful, timely, and important book. It brings together a wide variety of scientific materials, provides an assessment of what we know and don't know, and suggests guidelines for future research. While we have all been practitioner of conversation, this book should go far toward making us all students of conversation McLaughlin's current research interests are moving in two directions: electronic publishing and the delivery of art galleries and museum services over the Internet. She and Sheizaf Rafaeli (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) are co-editors of *The Journal of computer-Mediated Communication*. Delivered over electronic media, the journal seeks to make information more accessible and affordable, to emphasize global involvement, and to underscore the dynamic nature of research by encouraging reader-editor-reviewer-author interaction. Along with Rafaeli and Fay Sudweeks, McLaughlin has also contracted with MIT Press to co-author a book, *Network and Netplay: Virtual Groups on the Internet*. Finally, she is presently involved in a project designed to develop a tele-interactive virtual art museum on the World Wide Web.

In addition to her scholarly contributions, McLaughlin has given a remarkable amount of service to the discipline. In 1989 she was elected president of the International Communication Association (ICA). As president, she was responsible for planning the 1990 ICA conference in Dublin, an activity she claims gave her the "most satisfaction" of any academic endeavor. She has also been active in the Speech Communication Association (SCA), chairing the Interpersonal and Small Group Interaction Division in 1982 and 1983.

Since the mid-1980s, McLaughlin has held two prestigious editorships: *Communication Monographs* (1986 through 1989) and *Communication Yearbook Volumes 9 and 10* (1986 and 1987). She is presently serving (or has served) on nine editorial boards, including *Human Communication Research; Progress in Communication Sciences; Text; Communication, Mass Media and Journalism; The Quarterly Journal of Speech;* and *The International and Intercultural Communication Annual*.

Integration of Personal and Professional Life

Throughout much of her adult life, McLaughlin's professional and personal involvements have overlapped. She is married to Jim Buckalew, a professor of journalism at San Diego State University and a news anchor for KSDO, the top rated AM radio station in San Diego. They met through a mutual friend who, along with Buckalew and two other partners, owns a thoroughbred named "Academic Farms." The couple's educational backgrounds are remarkably similar. Both hail from Big Ten institutions; Buckalew attended the University of Iowa while McLaughlin was enrolled at the University of Illinois. Because of their common interest in communication, they "talk a lot about their work." But marriage has influenced McLaughlin's career in another, more significant way. After marrying Buckalew, she decided to relocate to San Diego. As a result of

her move, she now makes the 250-mile roundtrip commute to USC two to three times a week. While the long drive gives her plenty of time to think, it has also forced her to rely heavily on electronic media as a way of communicating with students and colleagues. McLaughlin sees this as a "blessing in disguise." What might have seemed like a burdensome aspect of her living arrangements has led to McLaughlin's current research interest in computer-mediated communication and the Internet—an area she finds "totally absorbing."

McLaughlin is the mother of two children and the stepmother of five. For McLaughlin, the key to balancing work and family is having a mate who is supportive of career decisions and willing to assume a fair share of the responsibilities associated with home and childrearing. She feels extremely fortunate, "having always been over-benefited rather in that regard." Still, McLaughlin admits to having assigned different priorities to professional and personal demands at different stages of life. There are times when she does little more than teach class, attend meetings, and advise students. When "the muse disappears" and McLaughlin has nothing to say, she does not write. At other times, however, she writes for 12 to 16 hours a day, "bounding out of bed at four or five in the morning to power up the computer." Family members complain about her during these times, while colleagues complain about her during the other phase. In general, she tries to strike a balance between putting out fires and tackling long-range professional projects. As McLaughlin notes, however, she isn't always successful. "There are days when [my daughter] Julia can't find any clean socks for school or I have forgotten to turn in my book order form." Given the extent of her professional and personal commitments, it is surprising that McLaughlin finds time for community service. However, within the last few years alone she has volunteered for a number of noteworthy organizations. For example, she was on the board of directors of Haven House, a shelter for victims of domestic violence. She has taught Sunday School for St. Edmund's Episcopal Parish and served as a member of their Outreach Commission, a group also edited a newsletter and served as a secretary for the Elizabethan Guild, a support group for Hillsides Home for Children, a residential facility for abused and neglected children.

In many ways, McLaughlin can be regarded as a pioneer. Her scholarship has shaped current thinking on situational features in communicative episodes, the use of accounts in everyday interaction, and the mechanisms through which conversation is organized. By overcoming sexual discrimination and going on to preside over some of the field's most prestigious organizations and scholarly outlets, McLaughlin paved the way for other women to hold positions of influence and responsibility. But regardless of gender, as long as people are students of human communication, they are indebted to McLaughlin for the contributions she has made

References

Cody, M.J., & McLaughlin, M.L. (1980). Perceptions of compliance-gaining situations: a dimensional analysis. *Communication Monographs*, 47, 132-148.

Cody, M.J., & McLaughlin, M.L. (1985a). The situation as a construct in interpersonal communication research. In M. L. Knapp & G. R. Miller (eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication.* (pp. 263-312). Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.

Cody, M. J., & McLaughlin, M. L. (1985b). Models for the sequential construction of accounting episodes: Situational and interactional constraints on message selection and evaluation. In R. L. Street & J. N. Cappella (eds.), *Sequence and pattern in communicative behavior.* (pp. 50-69). London: Arnold.

Cody, M. J., & McLaughlin, M. L. (1988). Accounts on trial: Oral arguments in traffic courts. In C. Antaki (ed.), *Analysing everyday explanation: A casebook of methods.* (pp. 113-126). London: Sage.

Cody, M. J., & McLaughlin, M. L. (1990). Interpersonal accounting. In H. Giles & W. P. Robinson (eds.), *Handbook of language and social phsychology.* (pp. 227-255). New York: Wiley.

Cody, M. J., McLaughlin, M. L., & Schneider, M. J. (1981). The impact of intimacyand relational consequences on the selection of interpersonal persuasion strategies: A reanalysis. *Communication Quarterly*, 29, 91-106.

McLaughlin, M. L. (1984). *Conversation: How talk is organized.* Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.

McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., Dickson, R., & Manusov, V. (1992). Accounting for failure to follow advice: Real reasons versus good explanations. In M. L. Mc-Laughlin, M. J. Cody, & S. J. Read (eds.), *Explaining one's self to others: Reason-giving in a social context.* (pp. 281-294). Hilsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & French, K. (1990). Account-giving and the attribution of responsibility: Impressions of traffic offenders. In M. J. Cody & M. L. McLaughlin (eds.), *The psychology of tactical communication.* (pp. 244-267). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & O'Hair, H. D. (1983). The management of failure events: Some contextual determinants of accounting behavior. *Human Communication Research*, 9, 208-224.

McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & Robey, C. S. (1980). Situational influences on the selection of strategies to resist compliance-gaining attempts. *Human Communication Research*, 7, 14-36.

McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & Rosenstein, N. E. (1983). Account sequences in conversations between strangers. *Communication Monographs*, 50, 102-125.

Rafaeli, S. R., McLaughlin, M. L., & Sudweeks, F. (in press). *Network and netplay: Virtual groups on the Internet.* AAAI/MIT Press.

Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. M. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review*, 33, 46-62.