Why Business Is Bad For Consumer Research: the Three Bears Revisited

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ABSTRACT - Morry ... an old guard ... came to us in Junior Kindergarten.... 'toe is the class' leading non-conformist.... favorite class is English.... illustrious Ledger Editor who writes unprintable, flaming editorials.... often referred to as Turtle.... is looking east to Harvard (The Arrow, High School Yearbook, Milwaukee Country Day 1961). "I'm coming at marketing problems from a slightly different direction," says Professor Morris B. Holbrook.... "The consumer is neglected, relative to the manager," says Holbrook. "If you accept the premise that business involves both, and 99.9 percent of the people who are studying business are studying managers, then it follows that the consumer is getting short shrift.".... Holbrook describes his research efforts as "trying to balance the scales a bit" (Dean's Annual Report, Columbia Business School. 1983).

INTRODUCTION

When Jagdish Sheth invited Beth Hirschman and me to co-chair this year's ACR Conference, he entreated us to do everything we could to include nonacademic practitioners and to represent their interests in the program. This mission rests, I believe, on the implicit assumption that increased interaction between academic consumer researchers and real-world managers constitutes a good thing and deserves encouragement. We responded by asking Jack Jacoby to chair this session on the interface between industry and academia. Jack has generously invited me to participate, knowing that I feel uncomfortable with the assumption that consumer researchers and practitioners should work more closely together. Indeed, as the abstract indicates, I am willing to play the devil's advocate and to present some highly personal views—not in my official capacity as a conference co-chairperson, but rather as a possibly foolish extremist who believes that business is bad for consumer research.

In saying that "business is bad," I use this phrase in a special sense. Specifically, I do not mean to imply that consumer researchers have suffered any serious decline in career opportunities. On the contrary, anyone visiting recent AMA meetings must have noticed that new PhD's in this area can demand attractive job offers. Meanwhile anyone already holding a marketing professorship can attract lucrative offers to collaborate with business in various ways.

I reject most such executive-teaching assignments, consulting opportunities, and other industrial partnerships because I believe that "business is bad" for consumer research in a second sense. Specifically, I believe that business hurts consumer research in roughly the same way that water douses fire or clouds cover the sun or an early frost hurts the citrus crop. To pick a lighter-hearted analogy, I believe that business does to consumer research approximately what the comedian Gallagher’s Sledge-O-Matic does to a watermelon. It smashes,
crushes, and pulverizes. If you want to sit in the front row at a Gallagher concert, you had better wear a raincoat. If you want to conduct consumer research in a business environment, you had better wear some tough skin.

Some ACR members--both managerial and academic types--may resist the conclusion that business is bad for consumer research. But, if they reject my view, I fear it will be because I have not adequately conveyed the logic on which it rests. This logic involves (1) a particular conception of the proper focus for consumer research, (2) a belief that consumer researchers typically depart from that focus, and (3) a conviction that, for at least three reasons, business interests should bear much of the blame for leading consumer researchers astray. I shall therefore begin by considering "The Proper Focus for Consumer Research;" shall next address the question "What is Wrong with Consumer Research?" and shall then turn to three factors implicating the involvement of business, which I shall call "The Three Bears Revisited" because I have previously discussed them in another context (Holbrook 1984).

THE PROPER FOCUS FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

In my view, consumer research should involve the development and testing of theory intended to explain and predict consumer behavior. Consumer behavior consists largely of consuming activities. Consuming activities entail consumption experiences. Consumption experiences should therefore comprise the primary subject matter addressed by consumer researchers.

I must emphasize that there is nothing radical about this view, except in the sense that a radish is a "radical" vegetable because it has "roots." Similarly, a focus on consumption experiences hearkens back to the roots of consumer research in the work of people like Norris (1941) and Abbott (1955):  

"Wants should be thought of not as desires for goods--but rather for the events which the possession of them makes possible.... Goods are wanted because they are capable of performing services--favorable events which occur at a point in time (Norris 1941, pp. 136-137)."

"What people really desire are not products but satisfactory experiences. Experiences are attained through activities. In order that activities may be carried out, physical objects or the services of human beings are usually needed.... People want products because they want the experience-bringing services they hope the products will render (Abbott 1955, p. 40)."

This emphasis on consumption experiences has won support from, among others, Boyd and Levy (1963), Woods (1981), Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Bloch and Bruce (1984), Belk (1984), Bristor (1984), Granzin (1984), and Firat (1985). It suggests that consumption activities and the experiences resulting therefrom should form the core of the substantive material studied by our discipline. Yet, as most of these same authors point out, consumer researchers have typically focused elsewhere? with a consequent distortion of emphasis.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH CONSUMER RESEARCH?

As implicitly recognized in Alderson's (1957) distinction between "buying" and "consuming," a gulf exists between phenomena involved in purchasing decisions and those pertaining to consumption experiences. Yet, even while acknowledging the conceptual primacy of the latter, consumer researchers too often put the cart before the horse and preoccupy themselves with the former. Typically, we study brand choice at the expense of product usage (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982); we dwell on buying behavior instead of consuming behavior (Belk 1984); we obsess over choosing and ignore using (Holbrook, Lehmann, and O'Shaughnessy 1983).

This misplacement of emphasis and this distortion of focus have attracted the attention of some distinguished scholars and critics. For example, in his ACR presidential address, Jacoby (1978) lamented that

"Most definitions of consumer behavior shackle us by confining attention to purchase.... Consumption must be given greater salience and be more tightly integrated with the existing consumer behavior literature (p. 94)."

Similarly, Sheth (1982) enumerates the deficits of consumer research and suggests, among other shortages, that not all consumers or all consumer behavior phenomena can be fully explained or understood by the decision-making perspective..... we still need more research and theory about the individual consumer but in the nondecision-making domains of....consumption life styles ... and consumption life cycle.... and consumer satisfaction (pp. 13-15).

I concur wholeheartedly with Jacoby's and Sheth's conclusions about what is wrong with consumer research. However, these critics raise an embarrassing question that they fail to answer--namely, what causes these problems with consumer research? Why do such problems exist? Why do consumer researchers persist in misdirecting their attention? Why do we wear blinders? Why do we energetically pursue what is less important while stubbornly ignoring what is more important?

I want to suggest that at least three factors help to account for what is wrong with consumer research. Earlier, I referred to some similar considerations as "the Three Bears" (Holbrook 1984). Here, I wish to modify and extend my treatment of the Three Bears and to indicate how, together, these ursine beasts ravage the golden splendor that might otherwise shine forth in the field of consumer research.

THE THREE BEARS REVISITED

My new view of the Three Bears links what is wrong with consumer research to three business-related factors: (l) a fundamental misconception of the nature of business; (2) domination of consumer research by the managerial perspective; and (3) the distorting influence of executive teaching, business consulting, industrial partners, and corporate sponsorship. I shall now discuss each of these hairy creatures in more detail.

A FUNDAMENTAL MISCONCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF BUSINESS

As a rough estimate, I would guess that at least 90 Z of academics considering themselves consumer researchers come from business schools. This pervasiveness of the business orientation would present no major problem were it not for the tendency of people in business schools to subscribe to a fundamental misconception of the nature of business. In brief, many of us think of the word "business" as synonymous with "management." This view diverges from the truth and introduces a serious bias into our research activities.

As a cornerstone of organizational theory, the systems view suggests that any organization is a dynamic, open network of inter-related parts. From this perspective, a business differs from other types of system by virtue of the fact that businesses always involve inter-relations between managers and customers. It follows that anyone seeking to understand business had better study the behavior of both managers and customers. Further, it seems reasonable to study the behavior of managers and customers in roughly equal measure.
Yet the curriculum of a typical business school lists courses devoted almost entirely to managerial behavior. In such areas as finance, accounting, law, organizational behavior, industrial relations, management science, banking, and even corporate strategy, one seldom takes the behavior of customers into account. Even so-called marketing courses in advertising, sales, or product management often reflect a preoccupation with the actions of managers. Only a handful of courses in marketing strategy, market research, or buyer behavior maintain a consistent focus on the customer. Of these, fewer still dwell on consumers as opposed to organizational buyers. Indeed, some marketing professors fail to recognize any important difference between the two.

By focusing most of our attention on managers at the expense of consumers, we in business schools misconstrue the central topic that we purport to study. When we scrutinize the behavior of managers while ignoring consumers, we see only half the picture. As far as developing a well-rounded view of business—is concerned, we are licked before we start. We wear a set of blinders that excludes important consumption phenomena from our field of vision.

DOMINATION OF CONSUMER RESEARCH BY THE MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Second, even when we occasionally dare to venture beyond the restricted horizons imposed by our misconception of business to look directly at consumer behavior, most of our research caters directly to the interests of managers—or, at least, to those of reviewers and journal editors who have adopted the managerial perspective (Cunningham and Enis 1983). This perspective dictates a focus on things that matter to managers—such as purchasing decisions, buying commitments, and brand choices. These phenomena happen in the stores; they affect cash-register activity at the checkout counter; they impact the firm's bottom line. They therefore prove endlessly fascinating to anyone who embraces the managerial perspective. For example, Fennell (1982) distinguishes between a "managerial orientation" and an "inappropriate orientation" (p. 1) and notes that "Marketing management's essential question is: What should we do to ensure that our brand is selected over competition?" (p. 8).

Clearly, those adhering to the managerial viewpoint may react with hostility to someone making the "inappropriate claim that consumption phenomena deserve study in their own right. I spoke recently to some distinguished colleagues at a major school of business and urged the importance of studying some emotional aspects of the consumption experience. To my naive surprise, these marketing scholars saw no merit in my argument until I reluctantly added the consideration that emotional responses to a product might exert feedback effects on subsequent purchasing behavior. This insistence on the imprimatur of relevance to brand choice reflects the managerial perspective with a vengeance. In directing attention away from consumption phenomena and toward buying behavior, managerialism rejects Sir Edmund Hillary's reason for climbing a mountain ("because it's there") in favor of Willie Sutton's rationale for robbing banks ("because that's where the money is"). This observation reminds us that, whereas the Greek Hermes or Roman Mercury served as the god of commerce, he was also the patron of thieves (Graves 1981).

A vivid illustration of the managerial viewpoint in action occurred in the review process for last year's AMA conference on marketing theory. Granzin (1984) presented a paper dealing with the consumption of food and describing an example based on dinner-preparation activities. I would be hard-pressed to think of any consumer behavior more centrally relevant to the consumption experience in everyday life. Yet one reviewer attacked the paper with the claim that dinner preparation is not of interest to consumer researchers and that Granzin should instead have focused on the shopping trip. I regard this piece of reviewing as an anchor point on the narrow-mindedness continuum. It might serve as a touchstone or benchmark against which to compare all other pretenders to the title of leadership in managerial obsession.

I have observed, informally and without empirical verification, that those most ardently espousing the managerial view often show a commensurate fascination with the sport of football. Accordingly, I have devised an analogy that speaks directly to these football fanatics in their own terms. This analogy is designed to reflect the managerial preoccupation with purchase outcomes and brand selections:

The extreme managerial perspective resembles a theory of football that focuses primarily on the kickoff. Such a view would note that we begin with an initial kickoff. Then some things happen on the field that we don't care about very much. Then, if all goes well, we may have another kickoff. Similarly, we might note that the buyer makes a trial purchase. Then some things happen that do not interest us very much. When, if all goes well, we may observe a repeat purchase. The view just expressed constitutes a terrible theory of football. It provides an equally poor theory of consumer behavior (Holbrook 1984).

I claim that we shall never understand consumer behavior until we abandon the managerial perspective. The managerial perspective channels our attention toward only those aspects or consumer behavior that affect the firm's market share. Yet most consumption activities matter in their own right and would deserve study even if they exerted no impact at all on business profitability. Think about it. People get up in the morning, start consuming the moment their does touch the carpet, allocate their time to various consumption activities throughout the day, and continue consuming until the 'allday off to sleep at night, after which they confine their consumption mostly to dreams, pajamas, and bed linens. One reviewer of our "fantasies, feelings, and fun" paper (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) commented sarcastically that our position implies that sleeping involves the consumption of sheets. The reviewer was correct: that is exactly what we mean to assert. Indeed, as if to reinforce our position, Burlington Mills has recently mounted a promotional campaign featuring the slogan "Never go to bed with a sheet you don't love." Warnsutta has replied with "an ingenious design that adds a dimension of fantasy, wit and whimsy." According to Warner (1983),

Love of linens is a sensory affair, based...on the feel, smell and look of the cloth. There's nothing quite like...the cottony, clean scent of a freshly starched sheet (p. 85).

In short, life consists largely of consumption experiences. Such experiences determine people's happiness, their well-being, their quality of life. They merit investigation even where they are of no particular interest to business managers. By comparison, the managerial perspective is parochial, self-interested, and unimportant in the general scheme of things.

THE DISTORTING INFLUENCE OF EXECUTIVE TEACHING, BUSINESS CONSULTING, INDUSTRIAL PARTNERS, AND CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Third, business interests sometimes play the role of wolf- or (to preserve my metaphor) bear-in-sheep's-clothing. Here, I refer to cases where managerially oriented activities are touted on the basis of their potential payoff in research opportunities. Variants of this argument assert that one should engage in executive teaching to get tuned-in to key research issues, should do business consulting so as to obtain data that might lead to publishable findings on real-world problems, should seek industrial partners in a joint attack on consumer-related issues, or should solicit corporate sponsorship to help fund worthwhile scholarly activities. Let's look a little more closely at each of these managerial shibboleths.

Executive Teaching and the Spirit of Anti-Intellectualism

I find it difficult to imagine that executive teaching ever serves as a basis for the development of important concepts. Rather, I feel that executives tend to thwart any serious scholarship wherever they encounter it. AE if looking for truffles, when they smell any academic essence-heavy they root it out; but—in contrast to the rules for a successful truffle hunt—they often destroy what they find
Over a half-century ago, Veblen (1918) developed a merciless caricature or the businessperson's inveterate anti-intellectualism:

the businessmen of this country, as a class, are of a notably conservative habit of mind.... the spirit of American business is a spirit of quietism, caution, compromise, collusion. and chicane (PP. 69-0).

The fact that Veblen spoke with a tone lodged somewhere between irony and nastiness does not entirely negate the relevance of his vision. He saw business executives as the bastions of intolerant conformity and self-interested parochialism, in whose cost/benefit analysis of mental exertion, intellectual curiosity loses every time:

Now, in that hard and fast body or aphoristic wisdom that commands the faith of the business community there is comprised the conviction that learning is of no use in business. This conviction is, further, backed up and colored with the tenet. . . that what is of no use in business is not worth while (Veblen 1918, P- 73).

Indeed, business executives tend to approach training programs with a resolute bias against scholarship and science. For them, "conceptual" is a pejorative term, "theory" virtually a dirty word:

The technologist and the professional man are, like other men of affairs, necessarily and habitually impatient of any scientific or scholarly work that does not obviously lend itself to some practical use...and the two unite with the business-man at large in repudiating whatever does not look directly to such a utilitarian outcome (Veblen 1918. P. 30).

Shils (1983) agrees that "the charge that universities are ivory towers has been...made from the... standpoint of the 'practical man,' usually the businessman, who could not see the point of intellectual activities which did not -w a profit or which did not contribute directly to industrial and agricultural production” (p. 17). From this perspective, business and scholarly interests, like oil and water, refuse to mix:

the training that comes of experience in business must...be held to unfit men for scholarly and scientific pursuits.... Indeed, within the ordinary range of lawful occupations these two lines of endeavor, and the animus that belongs to each, are as widely out of touch as may be. They are the two extreme terms of the modern cultural scheme (Veblen 1918, pp. 75-76).

From another viewpoint, one might interpret the behavior of executive trainees as support for our concept of hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Like everyone else, executives are consumers. When they come to executive training programs, naturally, they want to have fun. They seek a good time. They crave enjoyment and pleasure. They therefore adopt an anti-intellectual mood and insist that the atmosphere of a circus prevails.

Recently, a gifted executive teacher told me that his key to success lies in entertainment not intellectual content, jokes not ideas. Needless to say, my own efforts to amuse this audience fall miserably flat. Inevitably, they find me dry and dull. I wear these stigmata with a mixture of chagrin and pride. When the balance shifts too far toward chagrin, I recall my attendance at a national conference sponsored by a large trade association. This group's keynote speaker was one of the main characters from Hee Haw. Most o' us would not wish to move too close to that style of lecturing. Indeed, Shils (1983) rejects the Barnum-and-Bailey approach to executive teaching as action unbecoming a university officer:

It is not an obligation of a teacher to please his students; the attempt to please the students often gives rise to supine and degrading flattery without intellectual substance.... it should not be undertaken by university teachers, and their universities should not ask them to do so (pp. 46, 83).

However, I must also acknowledge that my rejection of the circus atmosphere contains some admixture of jealousy and the implicit admission that I lack the skills necessary to mount a convincing three-ring spectacle.

Superimposed on the executive's desire for entertainment value and practical relevance lurks a penchant for seeking action-oriented advice. According to the "Guidelines for Conference Papers" prepared by Jacoby and Olson (1983), one should deliver that advice with no trace of scholarly obtuseness:

Unfortunately, preparing a manuscript in a scholarly manner is often incompatible with the needs of executives and other applications-oriented decision makers. Unless they have reason to believe that a particular paper is directly relevant to their needs and will assist them in achieving higher levels of performance, most executives will disregard a "scholarly" paper, particularly if it contains unfamiliar jargon or is quantitatively sophisticated (pp. 1-2).

For an even clearer exposition of the same point, consider a recent letter from the Bureau of Business Practice:

The material we are looking for...should be hard-hitting and should land on the bottom line. It should make executives push away from their desks to go get started on an action plan proposed by one of your faculty members.... This material will be read by those on the front lines, in the foxholes--they need ideas that are usable now. (Neal 1984).

It appears from these guidelines that the objectives of appealing to action-oriented executives and the goals of scholarly research might resist reconciliation. Fennell (1982) offers a learned statement of this problem:

The tension that has existed between academics and practitioners in marketing may be a manifestation of an underlying paradigm clash--between the formal and explicit paradigm of experimental method in a laboratory setting in which many marketing academics are trained and marketing's implicit paradigm of action in the real world of human behavior (p. 11).

Fennell's explanation also tests rather low on the Flesch readability scale. A more straightforward presentation of a Closely related argument appeared in a recent letter from a top executive in one of the major packaged goods companies:

if the graduates I have seen from virtually all business schools do have a shortcoming, it's their lack of understanding that success in business requires more than thinking. ... it requires action.

This letter embraces a contrast between thinking and action, while managing to imply that somehow the latter should exist without the former. Incredibly, this misguided distinction receives support in a contrast drawn by Lindblom and Cohen (1979) between "analytical" and "interactive" problem solving. In a book called Usable Knowledge (which anachronistically features the picture of a slide-rule on its cover), these authors suggest the viability of the latter in some situations:
Clearly, I refer here to the well-worn distinction between basic and applied research, between pure and practical knowledge, between science and scholarship with "the capacity of university teachers to do research in his capacity as a member of a university (Shils 1983, pp. 43, 60-61)."

In lieu of a coin toss, one might consult one's slide-rule—unless, of course, a chicken happens to be handy:

"If all of the results of the scientist's research emerging from the particular project are to be kept secret, then he should not seek to do that kind of research in his capacity as a member of a university (Shils 1983, pp. 43, 60-61)."

Best of all, the adoption of such practical solutions saves time and liberates energies that can be devoted to extensive participation in executive-training programs. Business Consulting and the Abandonment of Joy

Another way in which business interests may distort consumer research arises from the consulting relationships engaged in by many marketing academicians. I acknowledge that most of us must feed and clothe our families and that consulting may prove expedient on these grounds. In this spirit, Harvard President Derek Bok (1982) points out that "for the faculty, opportunities to consult more frequently with research-minded companies can supplement salaries that have been declining in real terms for more than a decade" (p. 140). Indeed, most universities freely permit such consulting activities subject to the constraint that they not pose a conflict of interest by diverting too much faculty time—say, more than one day a week (Giambattia 1983; Omenn 1983; Shils 1983). For example, Columbia University's memo on conflicts of interest states in part:

Outside professional interests and employment, whether gainful or not, must not interfere with teaching, scholarly research, and other duties. Any outside interests or employment, including outside consulting work, undertaken by an officer of instruction during the academic year should be limited to no more than an average commitment of one day a week.... The officer of instruction should not accept any outside positions that tend to create conflict of interest with the officer's University position (Goodell 1968, p. 33).

(Notice that if teaching takes two days a week and other administrative duties one day a week, then consultants who followed such guidelines would be spending at least half of their available research energies on outside consulting work.)

It is quite another thing to argue, as some propose, that consulting work provides an optimum context in which to conduct consumer research. In my view, most aspects of the consulting climate differ from the kind of atmosphere needed to foster good research on consumer behavior. These differences include divergences in temporal perspective (short-run vs. long-run focus), objective function (sales or profits vs. knowledge payoffs), length of commitment (shifting as the business changes or executives switch jobs vs. seeking closure in order to publish or perish), interpersonal relations (aware of status differences vs. egalitarian), and concern for openness (maintaining secrecy vs. seeking a public forum).

Many such differences are encompassed by Hyde's (1983) distinction between work (which involves measurable inputs of time or energy, is paid, and is determined from outside) and labor (which unfolds at its own pace, may be unpaid, and is guided from within). Hyde (1983) draws heavily on Hagstrom's (1965) analysis of scientific research as a form of gift giving wherein the scientist contributes new knowledge in return for scholarly recognition (though this impairs the gift, a commodity to be sold for money. Moreover, one may expect an inverse relationship between the prestige accorded to scientific gift giving and the financial remuneration attached to money grubbing:

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scientists who treat ideas as gifts thereby enjoy higher repute in the community, they are more apt to be engaged in theoretical ("pure," "basic") research, and they are less well remunerated. Those who hire out to proprietary concerns are more anonymous and less a part of the community, they tend to be working in applied science, and they are better paid (Hyde 1983, p. 81)."

Thus, "manuscripts for which the scientific authors do receive financial payments such as textbooks and popularizations, are, if not despised, certainly held in much lower esteem than articles containing original research results" (Hagstrom 1965, p. 13).

From this perspective, consulting betrays the spirit of consumer research by converting a potential scientific gift into a marketable commodity.

In short, knowledge becomes property. As marketing managers are fond of intoning, the findings of consultants become proprietary:

"The basic difference between universities and industries (is)...the academic imperative to seek knowledge objectively and to share it openly and freely; and the industrial imperative to garner a profit, which frequently creates the incentive to treat knowledge as private property (Giambattia 1983, p. 5)."

This proprietary status of consulting constantly tempts executives to enshroud such information beneath a veil of secrecy. However, virtually everyone agrees that "secrecy conflicts...with the norms of free communication in science" (Hagstrom 1965, p. 88):

"The obligation to knowledge is met through investigation and "open" publication; secrecy is alien to the obligation of university teachers.... The general obligation is to undertake research which is publishable.... The open publication of the results of research is not only an obligation on university teachers, it is also a right which university teachers are entitled to expect from their colleagues.... If all of the results of the scientist's research emerging from the particular project are to be kept secret, then he should not seek to do that kind of research in his capacity as a member of a university (Shils 1983, pp. 43, 60-61)."

We have all collected our favorite horror stories about academic researchers precluded from publishing potentially important findings because of their proprietary nature. Nevertheless, this issue may distract us from more important problems involved in consulting relationships. The issue of secrecy assumes implicitly that consumer research is useful to managers and, therefore, that questions arise about whether to keep it secret lest competitors benefit from knowledge of important findings. Thus, Shils (1983) links "the requirement of secrecy... contrary to the tradition of science and scholarship" with "the capacity of university teachers to do research of practical value" (pp. 78-79). I believe, however, that consumer research should be as useless to managers as possible: it should be intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated. We should pursue consumer research for its own sake, not because of some managerial function that it performs. It follows that, if our research offers intrinsic value, no one should object to our publishing it because it should serve no particular managerial purpose. Barriers to publication for proprietary reasons should therefore be worn as a badge of failure. Hassles over secrecy signal the presence of utilitarian as opposed to scientific or scholarly value in a piece of consumer research. Hence, we should not be fighting for the freedom to publish research that has practical value to competitors. Rather, we should be fighting for the freedom to conduct research that has no practical use to any marketing manager.

Clearly, I refer here to the well-worn distinction between basic and applied research, between pure and practical knowledge, between
enlightenment and engineering, or between science and technology. For example, in distinguishing science from technology, Polanyi (1958) describes "a gap...between two kinds of knowledge...one derived from an acknowledged purpose, the other unrelated to any such purpose" (p. 175). Pursuing this contrast, Veblen (1918) might almost have been describing the difference between consulting and consumer research when he wrote in praise of "idle curiosity":

The one is motivated wholly by considerations of material expediency and the range of its interest and efforts is strictly limited by consideration of the useful effect to which the proficiency that it gives is to be turned; the other knows nothing of expediency, and is influenced by no consideration of utility or disutility, in its appreciation of the knowledge to be sought: ne animus of the one is wholly wisdom; of the other, idle curiosity (P. 27).

One hastens to add that the distinction between basic and applied research falls along a continuum that admits differences in degree:

There is a large gray area in between "pure" science at one end, and a highly targeted applied research at the other.... These gray areas are usually battlegrounds for academic scientists and scientists from industry or government, with the latter tending to assign greater weight to utility (Brooks 1978, p. 182).

Holton (1978) characterizes this debate as "knowledge for its own sake versus social usefulness" (p. 232).

To probe the proper place of consulting in the life of an academic, it helps to review the development of the American university. As portrayed by Bok (1982), this institution has emerged from a combination of three intellectual streams—the British emphasis on the moral preparation of gentlemen, the German research-orientation, and the Yankee ideal of usefulness and pragmatism. Kerr (1982) traces the tension between the British, German, and Yankee traditions back to the ancient Greek contrasts among Plato's Academy ("devoted to truth largely for its own sake"), the Pythagoreans ("concerned, among other things, with mathematics and astronomy"), and the Sophists (who "taught rhetoric and other useful skills"). The humanists, scientists, and professionals originally found their homes in diverse institutions such as the Ivy League schools, Johns Hopkins, and the land-grant colleges like Penn State. More recently, however, schools have followed the leads of Cornell and the University of Chicago by combining "liberal gentlemanly education," "science and scholarship as ends in themselves," and "professional and technical research and services" on the same campus (Ben-David 1972, p. 47):

Undergraduate life seeks to follow the British...and an historical line that goes back to Plato; the humanists often find their sympathies here. Graduate life and research follow the Germans...and an historical line that goes back to Pythagoras; the scientists lend their support to all this. The "lesser" professions (lesser than law and medicine) and the service activities follow the American pattern...and an historical line that goes back to the Sophists (Kerr 1982, p. 18).

Within this institutional framework, therefore, the tension between pure and applied consumer research reflects a broader contrast between the German ideal of science and scholarship and the American thrust toward utility and practicality:

In one view, ... inquiry should be allowed to push against any of the frontiers of knowledge, and not merely along that border where material benefits were promised. Fundamentally, this was the graduate school's conception of research.... In the other schools and departments, research was often geared to external and ulterior purposes.... The departments of commerce...tended to perfect the skills required by the industrial and business community. In this second view, research was a public service that originated in a client's need and ended in a client's satisfaction (Metzger 1955, pp. 107-108).

No one should presume to prescribe a set of values for another. However, I subscribe strongly to the German/Pythagorean/scholarly ideal of Wissenschaft (Kerr 1982, p. 4):

The very notion of Wissenschaft...signified a dedicated, sanctified pursuit. It signified...the goal of self-fulfillment...not the study of things for their immediate utilities, but the morally imperative study of things for themselves and for their ultimate meanings (Metzger 1955, p. 99).

This tradition prizes knowledge for its intrinsic rather than its extrinsic value. It seeks science and scholarship for their own sakes rather than because of some ulterior purpose that they serve or some function that they perform. It seeks knowledge not as a means but as its own self-justifying end:

Knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that any kind of knowledge, if it really be such, is its own reward (Cardinal Newman, quoted by Kerr 1982, pp. 2-3).

The university is knowledge oriented: knowledge for its own sake is not only an accepted result it is a desired result (Low 1983, p. 69).

The discovery and transmission of truth is the distinctive task of the academic profession.... That truth has a value in itself, apart from any use to which it is put, is a postulate of the activities of the university (Shils 1983, p. 3).

With characteristic wit, Veblen (1918) took this ideal, in which he passionately believed, and transformed its expression into language rich with such ironic terms as "esoteric knowledge," "idle curiosity," and "irresponsible science and scholarship"—all of which he intended as desiderata to be pursued and protected:

In any civilization there will be found something in the way of esoteric knowledge.... the knowledge in question is rated as an article of great intrinsic value.... the adepts who are occupied with this esoteric knowledge (are) the scientists and scholars on whom its keeping devolves.... esoteric knowledge...is activated by an idle curiosity, a disinterested proclivity to gain a knowledge of things.... This esoteric knowledge of matter-of-fact has come to be accepted as something worth while in its own right, a self-legitimating end of endeavor in itself...beyond the serviceability of any knowledge so gained.... the university is after all a seat of learning, devoted to the cult of the idle curiosity.--otherwise called the scientific spirit.... Within the university precincts any aim or interest other than those of irresponsible science and scholarship...are to be rated as interlopers (pp. 1-3. 8-11. 176. 32).

Because of its intrinsically motivated nature, the pursuit of science and scholarship for their own sakes entails a type of value shared with playful activities of all kinds "Research is in many ways a kind of game, a puzzle-solving operation in which the solution of the puzzle is its own reward" (Hagstrom 1965, p. 16). Thus, Polanyi (1958) sees mathematics as a form of play in which "the imaginative acts by which mathematics creates the object of its own discourse are.... the continued invention of a game in the very course of playing the game" (p. 186). Similar analogies between science and play have also suggested a close link between science and artistic creativity, as in Bronowski's
In science and in the arts the sense of freedom which the creative man feels in his work derives from what I have earlier called the poetic element in it: the uninhibited activity of exploring the medium for its own sake, and discovering as if in play what can be done with it. The word play is in place here, for...in this sense of free discovery, pure science is (like art) a form of play (P. 76).

Max Weber (1919) believed passionately in this connection between the intrinsically motivated natures of science and art; he spoke of scientific activity in such terms as "the inward calling for science," "this strange intoxication," "this passion," "enthusiasm," "inspiration," "frenzy," and "passionate devotion" (pp. 134-136). Similarly, Metzger (1955) links "the passion for truth" with "an idea of personal fulfillment" (p. 92), while Broad and Wade (1982) aver that "most researchers believe passionately in their work" and that "without such an emotional commitment, it would be hard to sustain the effort" (p. 216). Polanyi (1958) attributes this energizing element to the role of joyous discovery in the development of science:

The affirmation of a great scientific theory is in part an expression of delight.... This is the kind of feeling described... 35 "Intellectual Passions".... the intellectual passions by which science appreciates its own beauty. .. the overwhelming elation felt by scientists at the moment of discovery (pp. 133-134).

This theme of the intrinsically motivated, playful, autotelic aspects of scientific activity arises again and again in the commentaries of scholars from all branches of science brought together to honor the centennial of Einstein's birth in a volume called The Joys of Research (Shropshire 1981). An emphasis on Joyfulness, scientific beauty, and self-motivating curiosity recurs throughout, but reaches perhaps its most deeply-felt expression in Rosalyn Yalow's (1981) evocation of the psychic distance between her humble upbringing and the lofty peak of her research activities in biophysics:

It's been a long way for a girl born of immigrant parents, who aspired for her to be an elementary school teacher.... my father graduated from eighth grade.... my mother...graduated from sixth grade.... They knew their children would go through college, but they didn't know what physics was.... I'm a scientist because even at this stage I love investigation. Even after the Nobel Prize, the biggest thrill is to go to my laboratory and hope that that day I will know something nobody ever knew before. There are very few days when it happens, but the dream is still there. That's what it means to be an investigator. 115).

Could anyone be so callous and calculating as to abjure this dream of joyous fulfillment and to argue instead for the comparative merits of applied research aimed at pragmatic applications? Of course someone could, and many such someones may be found wearing the hats of business executives and managerial practitioners. Collectively, they criticize pure research for its lack of relevance to real-world problems. Here, they echo a critique or superstition that, too often, basic scientific research has been conducted as an end in itself, with the result that the practical aspects that could be of great benefit to the public have been obscured or lost (Hutt 1978, p. 160).

Some academic legitimation for this viewpoint appears in the aforementioned book entitled Usable Knowledge by Lindblom and Cohen (1979):

In some preliminary studies, we have interrogated willing social scientists on their rationales for project choice. The justification of their projects appeals not to developed knowledge of how and when social science is or is not useful, but simply to judgments about the "importance" of the problem to be studied.... judgment about the importance of a problem is a naive and wholly indefensible guide to research priorities (pp. 97-88).

This challenge to enlightenment reflects the Yankee tradition of vocational education evinced by Benjamin Franklin when he tried to dedicate the University of Pennsylvania to "a more useful culture of young minds" (quoted by Kerr 1982. P. 12)

The contemporary idea of directed, "mission-oriented," or applied research arose at the American universities by the end of the last century.... Work was initiated...because there was... an actual or potential demand for services in some vaguely and unscientifically defined field of interest (such as... business management) (Ben-David 1972. PP. 101-102).

The Yankee spirit survives in the arguments of those favoring the escalation of marketing consultancy in consumer research. The elevation of practical relevance above knowledge for its own sake constitutes the apotheosis of Yankee know-how. It embodies the spirit of Benjamin Franklin whose devotion to useful results prompted him to stand outside in a thunderstorm, flying a kite and waiting to get hit by lightening. Yankee practitioners are the lightening rods of scientific endeavor. Certainly, they have every right to do their work in peace, but they should avoid imposing their pragmatic standards on others. Go, Yankees, go and fly your kites as you see fit, but do not apply your unremitting standard of utility to other consumer researchers whose kites have different colors and different reasons for flying.

In challenging the Yankees, I echo what Bok (1982) calls the "exaggerated" (p. 76) and "shriill" (p. 75) claims of the "traditionalists":

Traditionalists...charge that many professors spend too much of their time consulting with corporations or advising government officials on specific policy issues.... Solving practical problems may have immediate importance, but the search for basic knowledge and understanding serves an even greater purpose.... If we allow the pursuit of knowledge and understanding to slacken in our universities, the damage will be irreparable, for such intellectual pursuits cannot be carried on effectively in any other setting (PP. 68-69).

Though Bok (1982) himself disavows this conclusion, many of the scholars already mentioned support the traditionalist perspective. For example, Yale president A. Bartlett Giamatti (1983) asserts that "the constant challenge for the university is to know in clear and principled terms how to cherish learning, and its pursuit" (p. 9). For Hagstrom (1965), this means that "persons should be excited by discoveries, intensely interested in the detailed working of nature, and committed to the elaboration of theories that are of no use whatever in daily life" (p. 9). Hence, Shils (1983) rules out usefulness as a proper academic incentive and argues that "the primary task of the academic profession is the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, not its application" (p. 9). Accordingly, he regards consulting activities askance and does not smile on the advocates thereof:

The prospective "users" of knowledge... have... begun to demand something more immediately practical.... They begin to inveigle academics to do research designed for immediate practical use, alongside or instead of concentrating on the advancement of fundamental knowledge.... It is not that all these services are...despicable.... Many of these services are valuable to society.... Nevertheless, they extend the nonintellectual preoccupations of the university and they are distractions from its central responsibilities for teaching and discovery (pp. 18-20).
Giamatti concludes that "when a professor decides to take substantial...managerial responsibility for the success of a company, he likely would best serve the university by relinquishing tenure and assuming adjunct status" (quoted by Chemical and Engineering News 1983, p. 32).

My story on the relative merits of consulting in consumer research is nearly complete but requires, as its capstone, one more look at the acerbic writings of Veblen. Veblen (1918) reaches a conclusion quite close to that just stated by Shils:

A university is an endowed institution of culture.... This work has no business value, in so far as it is work properly included among the duties of academic men. Indeed, it is a fairly safe test; work that has a commercial value does not belong in the university (p. 151).

This conclusion, so widely shared by others, appears in safe, orderly prose that might have been written by any competent scholar. However, just in case we didn't get the point, Veblen (1918) adds a more colorful expression of the same thought:

Intimate association with..."utilitarians" unavoidably has its corrupting effect on the scientists and scholars, and induces in them also something of the same bias toward "practical" results in their work.... The university of medieval and early modern times, that is to say the barbarian university, was necessarily given over to the pragmatic, utilitarian disciplines, since that is the nature of barbarism.... The barbarian culture is pragmatic, utilitarian, worldly wise, and its learning partakes of the same complexion. The barbarian, late or early, is typically an unmitigated pragmatist; that is the spiritual trait that most profoundly marks him off from the savage on the one hand and from the civilized man on the other hand (pp. 31-34).

Industrial Partners and the Forfeit of Academic Freedom

Hofstadter (1955) and Metzger (1955) have chronicled the often painful and arduous development of academic freedom in the American university. Hofstadter (1955) traces the concept of academic freedom to its historical roots:

The modern idea of academic freedom has been developed by man who have absorbed analogous ideas from the larger life of society. From modern science they have taken the notion of a continuing search for new truths, fostered by freedom of inquiry.... From commerce they have taken the concept of a free competition among ideas.... From the politics of the liberal state they have taken the ideas of free speech.... From religious liberalism... have come the ideas of toleration and religious liberty (p. 61).

Again, we encounter a 19th Century German concept-namely, the dual ideals of Lernfreiheit (freedom of Learning) and Lehrfreiheit (freedom of teaching and inquiry). The latter found expression in 1915 in the American Association of University Professors' call for "complete and unlimited freedom to pursue inquiry and publish its results," on the grounds that "freedom is the breath in the nostrils of all scientific activity" (Metzger 1955, p. 134). In 1940, the M UP and the Association of American Colleges adopted a joint statement proclaiming that "freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth" so that "the teacher is entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results" (Metzger 1955, pp. 213-214).

But the proclamation of free inquiry does not necessarily guarantee its attainment. Free inquiry exists where the course of scholarly or scientific endeavor reflects impulses arising from within the university as opposed to forces from outside. This contrast between internal and external pressures raises a perennial question for the determination of research Priorities:

The problem is frequently formulated in terms of the relative roles of internal and external criteria in setting research priorities.... emphasis on internal criteria, on truth rather than utility... implies an implicit priority for the "best science" regardless of considerations of social benefits or consequences. It must be recognized that any other scale of judgment implies a conscious decision to support less good science at the expense of better science for reasons lying outside science (Brooks 1978, pp. 178, 181).

The balance in this trade-off between internal and external criteria bears directly on the extent of free inquiry practiced in any given situation. As several contributors to a recent volume edited by Holton and Morison (1978) make clear, certain limits to free inquiry must be set where externalities threaten the welfare of uninformed subjects, innocent bystanders, or the general society. One must regulate research on nuclear reactors, for example, if it threatens to blow up a major city. Everyone agrees on the necessity for such restraints in cases that bear directly on the public safety, but many would resist the bid for external control claimed by Thomas Kiley (1983) of Genetech as the industrial partner's birthright:

Make no mistake about it: for-profit corporations are, by definition, not in business to give away money. Where they provide money for research, they invariably do so in order to gain competitive advantage (p. 63).

Such claims signal the inevitability that "as the ties between universities and industries grow increasingly closer, a balance must be struck between the intellectual independence of the scientist and the university and the industrial desire for commercial opportunity" (Gore 1983, p. 125). Nelkin (1978) argues convincingly that, faced with such tradeoffs between internal and external priorities, the ideal of free inquiry must be jealously guarded by the continual efforts of scientists and scholars to oppose external pressures in a process of continued negotiations. Such negotiations pit academics against agents of external control. The external agent's role is to insist. The scientist's role is to resist. Any scientist who capitulates prematurely is a poor negotiator and a disappointment to those who study the sociology of science. Researchers who advocate compromise cease to play their roles as scientists.

Few scholars fail to play their role by reacting with horror to any threat to free inquiry posed by external control. Ugly images of Galileo, Alexander Winchell, Edward Ross, and other victims of persecution flit before the mind's eye as one ponders the intolerability of unnecessary restrictions placed on the search for truth (Hofstadter 1955; Metzger 1955). Most regard free inquiry as a precondition to the advancement of knowledge:

In the long run, . . . the scientific enterprise depends on the freedom of scientists to select the problems on which they will work.... nonconformity with the norm of independence means deviation from the goals of science (Hagstrom 1965, pp. 109-110).

In science, there is no substitute for independence.... Dissent is the native activity of the scientist.... Dissent is not itself an end; it is the mark of freedom.... No one can be a scientist, even in private, if he does no: have independence of observation and of thought (Bronowski 1965, pp. 61-62).

University presidents stand united in their determination "to protect and to foster an environment conducive to free inquiry, the advancement of knowledge, and the free exchange of ideas" (Giamatti of Yale 1983, p. 4) in which "the choice of the research or projects to be undertaken must reside in the university and its faculty" and "there must be absolute freedom to accept and to reject the work that is to be done" (Low of RPI 1983, p. 75);
The...critical element is an environment of freedom in which professors can do their work without constraints or external direction.... Even less desirable than centralized direction is the imposition of restraints on the kinds of ideas and hypotheses that scholars can publicly entertain (Bok of Harvard 1982, PP. 19-70).

Against this background of insistence on free inquiry, recent developments on campuses all across the country have focused the attention of university administrators on issues concerning the relationship between industry and academia in joint ventures and cooperative research (Chemical and Engineering News, 1982a). As federal sources of funding have dried up, industry sources have played a larger role than heretofore--particularly in areas of innovative technology such as genetic engineering and computer sciences. This growing linkage of academia to industrial partners has raised some hotly debated questions:

The question is whether academia can sell its scientific knowledge, lease its faculty, and serve as a novel type of public utility to commerce without sacrificing the academic ideal of free inquiry and the scientific ethic of open transfer of knowledge (Chemical and Engineering News 1983, p. 32).

Some critics contend that because it is aimed at producing business profit, business-funded research threatens the freedom of university scientists to pursue knowledge for its own sake (Carey 1982, p. 33).

We have heard concerns expressed about the pervasive influence of commercialization on the choice of scientific questions by faculty--or their selection of research ideas, if marketability and the quest for financial rewards drive their decisions (Wyngaarden 1983, p. 129).

Again, the university presidents have marched forth to shoulder and stir up the debate on industrial-academic partnerships and technology transfer. For example, the Pajaro Dunes conference attended by the presidents of Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Cal Tech, and the University of California (Rosenzweig 1983) pondered the ties between business and academia and concluded that attractive as these relationships are, they present a host of problems. The most important of these...is the potential distortion such relationships may cause to academic objectives (Chemical and Engineering News 1982b, p. 4).

Moreover, university presidents have spoken independently but univocally on the potentially devastating consequences of any interference with the free inquiry on which science rests (Hackney 1983; Low 1983):

the faculties of every distinguished research university...are concerned that programs to exploit technological development will confuse the university's central commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and learning by introducing into the very heart of the academic enterprise a new and powerful motive--the search for commercial utility and financial gain.... the prospect of reaping financial rewards may subtly influence processors in choosing which problems to investigate.... few people would welcome a situation in which academic scientists did not simply consider which potential problems for research were most intellectually challenging and important but were influenced by powerful extraneous factors, such as the prospect of large financial rewards (Bok 1982, pp. 142, 149).

Thus, university spokesmen acknowledge the fear that "as the university moves closer to a partnership with industry,...the university inevitably relinquishes some of its unique capabilities for unrestricted exploratory research and freedom or action" (Fusfeld 1983, p. 18) so that "the corporation's profit motive will skew the university's research away from the pursuit or basic science and perhaps even truth" (Wendt 1983, p. xvi). Simply put, "universities fear that, since little money comes without strings attached, firms may apply undue pressure on the research enterprise" (Hackney 1983, p. xiii). In the old aphorism, he that pays the piper calls the tune. This truism is captured humorously in a limerick quoted by Kerr (1982):

There was a young lady from Kent
Who said that she knew what it meant
When men took her to dine,
Gave her cocktails and wine;
She knew what it meant--but she went.

Predictably, Veblen (1918) heaps his scorn on the process whereby business interests interfere with free inquiry. He begins by proclaiming the necessity of free inquiry as a basis for the growth of knowledge:

the spirit of disinterested inquiry must have free play...without afterthought as to the practical or utilitarian consequences which this free inquiry may conceivably have.... Nothing is felt to be so irremediably vicious in academic policy as a coercive bias... in so far as it touches that quest of knowledge that constitutes the main interest of the university.... A free hand is the first and abiding requisite of academic policy as a basis for the growth of knowledge:

...critical element is an environment of freedom in which professors can do their work without constraints or external direction.... Even less desirable than centralized direction is the imposition of restraints on the kinds of ideas and hypotheses that scholars can publicly entertain (Bok of Harvard 1982, PP. 19-70).

Corporation Sponsorship and the Business-School Blindspot

I trust I have said enough about industrial partners and their potential threat to free inquiry to indicate that this theme pervades the consciousness of university administrators and educational philosophers at the present time. What amazes me is the relative lack of interest in such issues expressed by the faculties and staffs in our schools of business. One rarely hears about a business-school administration that is concerned because its faculty does too much consulting, too much work on industry grants, or too much corporation-sponsored research. It never seems to occur to anyone in a business school that there might be anything wrong with these lucrative activities or that, just as in other parts of the university, the possible bias due to corporate sponsorship might affect work conducted in the business school so as to divert scholarship and science from the pursuit of knowledge through free inquiry.
Might such a distortion of academic objectives beset consumer research conducted by business professors? I cannot definitively resolve the question of whether there is anything wrong with the corporate sponsorship of consumer research, but I must assert that we should at least be concerned about this issue. We should at least pause to ask ourselves if whatever constitutes integrity in consumer research is threatened by asking industry to pay for it. We should at least wonder whether intellectual freedom is in part compromised by letting practitioners exert partial control over our directions for inquiry. We should at least reflect on whether the scope of our research might be unnecessarily restricted by confining our attention to problems that happen to interest marketing managers.

As previously noted, other disciplines have shown intense sensitivity to analogous issues. Suddenly, they have found out what it's like to let industry get in there and mess with your research and they don't like it. As soon as business intrudes into science, one hears complaints from scientists about loss of academic freedom and interference with scholarly integrity. Yet, in my experience, one seldom hears such complaints voiced in the context of business schools or among consumer researchers. Apparently, we are like fish in water. We have so long been submerged under the influence of business sponsorship that we don't even notice it any more. We have grown so accustomed to its effects that they have disappeared for us.

In my view, this is the most insidious aspect of the manner in which business interests may distort consumer research, precisely because no one seems to notice it. In particular, I fear that a corporate sponsor's apparent hands-off posture may lull the consumer researcher into a false sense of academic freedom in which distorting influences of utility and practicality may still intrude. As Hofstadter (1955) points out, the undetected interference with free inquiry is the most threatening of all: "there is no condition more dangerous to a community than subjective freedom...without objective freedom" (p. 259).

If other disciplines worry about the intrusion of business into their research, why don't we? Some might reply that, since business schools (unlike other disciplines) study business, it is acceptable for their research directions to be guided by business interests. But this argument implies that researchers should be dominated by the things they study. I find this logic unpersuasive. A nuclear physicist studies fission and fusion, but we don't conclude from this that he should be blown to smithereens by a bomb. An ichthyologist studies fish, but we don't find it acceptable for her to be swallowed by a whale. Why, then, should we who teach in business schools cheerfully agree to submerge ourselves in business interests to the point where we lose our own identities and disappear?

Some might argue that there is nothing wrong with being reasonably flexible and bending our research interests a little to suit the needs of business. But, very quickly, "bent" becomes "biased," "biased" becomes "distorted," and "distorted" becomes "warped." I learned in grade school that the separation of powers between church and state; among executive, legislative, and judicial branches; between family and school—is a fundamental tenet of the pluralistic democratic system. To want anything less seems downright anti-American and may help account for the scorn in which business schools are often held by other branches of the university. They sense, perhaps unfairly, that we have sold out. But what are we doing to insure that their assessment is inaccurate?

Usually, we swim in the tide of corporate sponsorship without really noticing the ebb and flow of the invisible currents that steer us. But occasionally, like seaweed, some otherwise unseen pressure floats to the surface where we can catch it and examine it under close scrutiny. For example, I recall a meeting in which the representative of a manufacturer of business equipment discussed lending personal computers to my school in return for certain "deliverables" consisting of marketable software. I recall a session with members of a giant food conglomerate in which sponsorship of consumer research that cut across product lines received the cold shoulder because it extended beyond the bounds of any one division's accountability. I recall the words of the director of a major nonprofit research-funding institute, who informed me that the institute's corporate donors want "marketing-relevant" research and that work on such aspects of consumer behavior as consumption-related social welfare would not interest them.

I acknowledge that the attempts of those in business to steer academic research on consumer behavior are usually subtle, well-intentioned, and friendly. Often, however, their overtly reasonable tone only renders them more restrictive to free inquiry. For example, suppose that a policy committee has been charged with developing proposals for research on consumer durables to be funded by a set of generous sponsoring corporations. Further suppose that, as a basis for encouraging research ideas, one committee member (who works for a major retailing chain) has suggested the following definition of "consumer durables":

An infrequently purchased product (or major component of a product) which is not changed in size, shape or content by normal use and requires an outside or self-contained source of power in order to function.

This definition contains some logical flaws and inconsistencies. First, some durables may be frequently purchased (e.g., books or records), while some nondurables may be bought infrequently (e.g., caviar and snails). Second, durables may change their size or shape during consumption (e.g., houseplants, mobile sculptures, or model airplanes). Third, some durables fail to require an external source of power (e.g., furniture or works of art). The most serious problem with the proposed definition, however, is that it stems from a perspective that implicitly guides research toward issues of particular concern to the spokesman (e.g., appliance retailing). The definition therefore reflects private values and attempts to steer science toward company-oriented ends.

Some might argue that, because it neglects the grim realities of funding in academic institutions, my position is impractical. To these critics, I reply: Haliehlah. I certainly hope that I am being impractical, nonphilantillarian, noninstrumental. If I were not impractical, how could I insist on the merits of intrinsically motivated inquiry? How could I suggest that consumer research should be a playful, autotelic, ludic, creative activity?

But if this logic is applied to consumer research and managers are precluded from setting or influencing research priorities, won't they complain? Of course they will. That is their function, a function that they have been entrusted with carrying out faithfully. Meanwhile, consumer researchers should perform the function of opposing such forces tooth and nail. Indeed, this dialogue gives the sociologists of science something to write about. They, too, need to earn a living. It is our duty to oblige.

In short, it is our scholarly and scientific duty as consumer researchers to react to any attempt by marketing practitioners or other business executives to set our research priorities with the same vehemence that characterizes the stance of Nobel Prize-winner James Watson, clearly a very smart man. In responding to those wishing to regulate his research, Watson told opponents that they were "kooks, . . . and incompetents" (Nelkin 1978, p. 204). We need only search for a more diplomatic way to say the same thing.

DENOUEMENT

I do not expect that everyone will agree with all the things I have said about the Three Bears. I have called them narrow-minded and anti-intellectual. I have argued that they constrict the scope of consumer research by imposing a focus on purchasing decisions at the expense of consumption experiences. I have charged that they misconstrue the nature of business, dominate our research by their managerial perspective, and distort our scholarly efforts through their influence via executive teaching, business consulting, industrial partners, and corporate sponsorship.

By now, the reader will have noticed that consumer research corresponds to Goldilocks in the story of the Three Bears. Unfortunately, my version of the story lacks the happy ending that you may recall from the fairy tale you heard as a child. When the bears returned to the cottage from their day in the woods, they found Goldilocks peacefully asleep, consuming some sheets. They immediately did what any self-
respecting bears would do. They killed her on the spot.

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