

## PROLEGOMENON: MARKETING, ETHICS, AND QUALITY-OF-LIFE

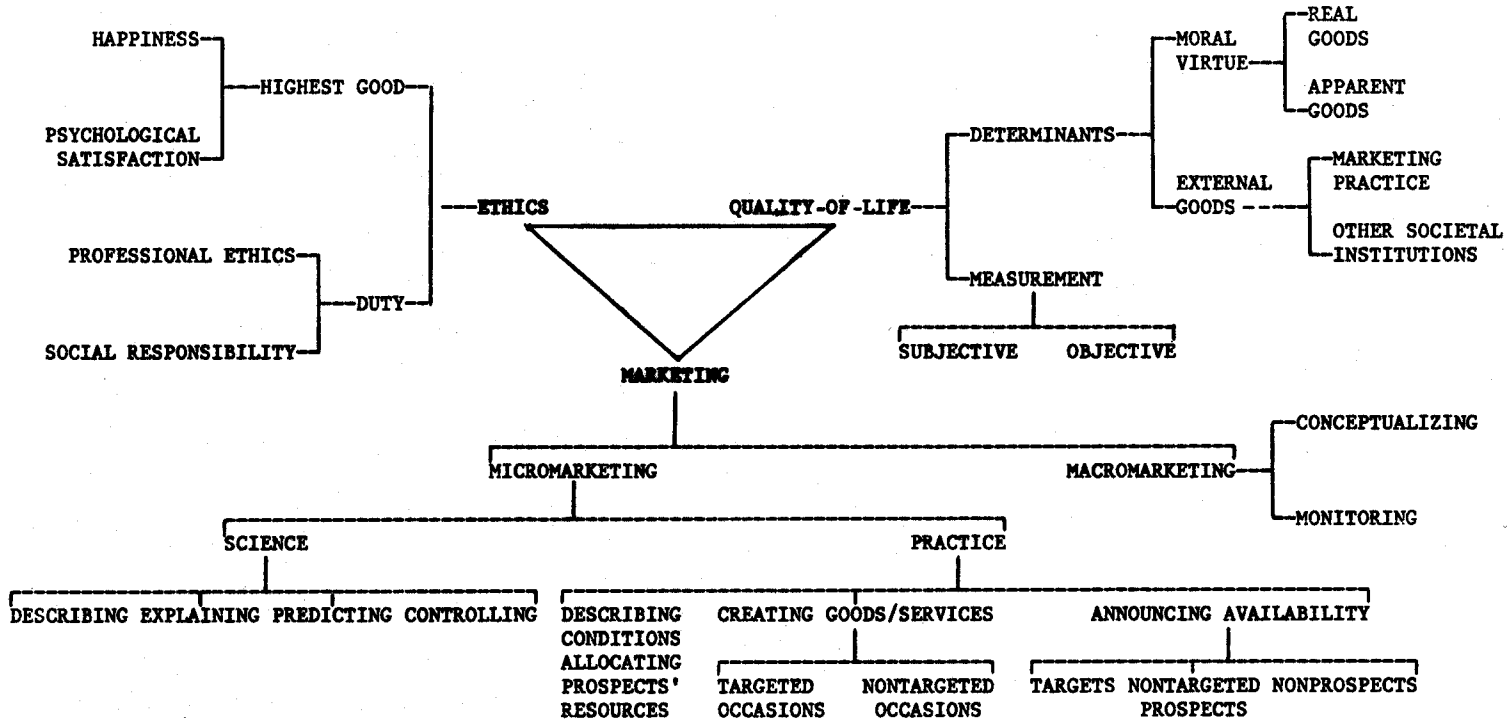
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### CONCEPTUAL RAMIFICATIONS

Each of the terms in the triad marketing, ethics, and quality-of-life (QOL) needs some clarification, and their juxtaposition raises additional issues. Indeed, marketing may be the least well articulated of the three and, for present purposes, the most in need of clarification. It is patently impossible to discuss an activity's likely impact on QOL, or its ethical implications, in the absence of some precise idea of the nature of that activity. In this regard, marketing is something of an anomaly. For the past quarter century, in presenting the marketing concept, authors of textbooks have described marketing as an activity that differs from, and in fact sharply contrasts with, selling. Yet, the implications of the distinction remain to be articulated. Many marketing authors continue to use the term "marketing" in ways that appear to be interchangeable with "selling" or "promoting." Furthermore, marketing theorists have failed to provide representations of marketing activity that reflect the marketing concept. At the same time, the marketing concept flourishes in the day-to-day activities of marketing practitioners who understand that implementing the admonition, "Don't sell what you happen to make; make what the customer wants to buy," requires concepts of behavior, research techniques, powers, and responsibilities within the firm that are vastly different from those that are appropriate to a selling function. As a prelude to discussing the issues of ethics and QOL that marketing raises, let us address fundamental questions about the nature of marketing in today's society.

*Marketing.* Exhibit 4.1 shows where a discussion of marketing may make contact with ethics and QOL. First, with regard to marketing, we must distinguish micro and macro levels, micro having to do with the science and practice of marketing at the level of a single enterprise, and macro with conceptualizing

**Exhibit 4.1**  
**Conceptual Ramifications**



and monitoring the overall societal impact of all marketing activity. Within micromarketing, it is the task of marketing scientists to address the classic activities of scientific method, namely, describing, explaining, predicting, and controlling in domains that the marketing practitioner's assignments implicate. It is the task of marketing practitioners to make decisions about what to produce for whom in which contexts, and what to communicate when and where.

*Ethics—Duty.* Students of ethics study the nature of duty and of the highest good. With regard to duty, it is useful here to distinguish social responsibility and professional ethics. Issues of social responsibility relate to what marketers, academics, and practitioners owe to the nonmarketing community; professional ethics relates to our duties vis-à-vis our colleagues and clients, within and between marketing's two major constituencies of academics and practitioners. I leave treatment of professional ethics to another occasion and focus here on marketing's responsibility to the rest of society. The professional or business criterion for evaluating the decisions of marketers usually comprises diverse considerations relating to the self-interest of the organization. It may embrace, for example, the extent to which marketers' decisions contribute to a satisfactory return on investment, while making the best use of the firm's technological expertise and contacts with suppliers/distributors, and maintaining acceptable standards of legality and prudence. In contrast, what it means to discuss the ethics of marketing activity, or socially responsible marketing, is that the organization's self-interest is no longer the relevant criterion but is replaced by considerations of "right behavior." Students of ethics disagree on which considerations are relevant and on how a standard of right behavior is to be conceptualized (e.g., Beauchamp and Bowie, 1983; Fisk, 1983; Murphy and Laczniak, 1981), a realm of discussion I will not join here. My present objective is to bring previously unarticulated aspects of marketing into focus so that sources of potential harm, and conditions that favor or block ameliorating the harm, may be described. In this way, I hope to clarify the kinds of circumstances in which the issue of right behavior comes up for discussion in connection with marketing.

*Ethics—Highest Good.* With regard, then, to duty as an ethical concern, the issue is that of preventing or ameliorating harm. In contrast, ethical reflection on the highest good prompts us to examine the extent to which marketing hinders or helps people to attain the good life. In addressing themselves to the nature of the highest good, students of ethics have thought deeply about human happiness; elements from their analysis are used to introduce my discussion of factors that contribute to the quality of human lives. They have considered an issue that touches the very core of marketing, namely, the lack of correspondence between psychological satisfaction and happiness in its ethical sense.

*Quality-of-Life.* Whereas marketing authors mainly discuss issues relating to measuring the quality-of-life (e.g., Sirgy, Samli, and Meadow, 1982), my main interest here is to consider marketing as one of many determinants of quality. In doing so, it is necessary to bear in mind that various aspects of marketing may be relevant to QOL in different ways: marketing practice directly affects the quality of individual human lives; marketing's scholarly and scientific activ-

ities, e.g., conceptualizing, researching, and monitoring at both micro and macro levels, contribute indirectly not only to measuring, but also to understanding the determinants of the quality of human lives.

This chapter begins and ends with brief reflections on marketing's possible contribution to happiness and the quality of human life. In between, there are two long sections on the marketing function in today's society making up a discussion of marketing's role as intermediary between user and producer and an inquiry into the present-day ramifications of the user-producer transaction. My objective is to clarify issues for ethical review: specifically, to identify players, contexts, and relationships, and to consider sources of potential harm and conditions relevant to ameliorating the harm. In a word, this chapter attempts to prepare the ground for ethical debate on a subsequent occasion concerning the duties, rights, and opportunities that arise in connection with marketing activity.

## HAPPINESS AND QUALITY-OF-LIFE

The idea of a happy life holds a central place in Western philosophy. As marketers, when we turn our attention to the subject of the quality-of-life we are fortunate in being able to consider reflections on the sources of happiness by Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Kant, among others. Indeed, until the recent interest of economists and marketers in QOL, philosophers with some justification claimed that reflecting on human happiness was their exclusive preserve.

"Happiness," according to Aristotle, "consists in a complete life lived in accordance with virtue and accompanied by a moderate possession of external goods." Among the many issues implied here are the following: (1) Virtue, in the sense of making "right" choices, is necessary but not sufficient for happiness; rather (2) happiness depends both on *perfections* (of body, character, and mind), and *possessions* (economic goods, political goods, and the goods of human association); (3) the possessions, i.e., the external good things, on which happiness depends include those that are within our power to obtain and those whose possession depends on favorable circumstances; and (4) the necessary external goods embrace more than just economic goods, which traditionally have been the concern of marketers, and include the categories of political goods and goods of human association. Regarding the fourth issue, Mortimer J. Adler (1984, p. 116) states:

If morally virtuous persons can live well and become happy in spite of dire poverty; in spite of being enslaved; in spite of being compelled by circumstances to lead (limited) lives, with insufficient time for leisure; in spite of an unhealthy environment; in spite of being disenfranchised and treated as nonparticipating subjects of government rather than as citizens with a voice in their own government, then the social, political, and economic reforms that eliminate these conditions and replace them with better ones make no contribution to human happiness.\*

\*From *A Vision of the Future* by Mortimer J. Adler. Copyright © 1984 by Mortimer J. Adler. All quotations therefrom reprinted with permission of the publisher, Macmillan Publishing Company.

The reflections of philosophers on the subject of human happiness orient us to who the players are. The individual, each individual, has a role to play in determining the quality of his or her life, but external circumstances make their independent contribution. In view of its concern with supplying economic goods, marketing is one, but just one, of the major players that provide these external circumstances (Exhibit 4.1). Considered as a business activity, marketing is intimately involved in, but not the sole determinant of, the quality-of-life; and the nature of its contribution is considered in greater detail later on. Considered as a discipline, marketing, specifically macromarketing's role in studying the impact of marketing on society as a whole, conceptualizes, measures, and monitors the quality-of-life. Note, here, a difficulty that lies beneath the surface of Aristotle's reflection on happiness. Augustine brings the issue to the fore more pointedly when he says: "Happy is the man who, in the course of a complete life, attains everything he desires, *provided he desire nothing amiss.*" (Adler, 1984, pp. 91–92, emphasis added). Adler develops the point as follows (1984, p. 90):

In its ethical meaning, the word "happiness" stands for a whole human life well lived, a life enriched by all real goods—all the possessions a human being should have, all the perfections that a human being should attain. What makes them real, as opposed to merely apparent goods, is that they fulfill our inherent human needs, not just our individual, acquired wants. We ought to want them, whether in fact we do or not. Here again is where virtue comes into the picture, now in relation to our seeking or failing to seek the things that are really good for us.

Adler goes on to distinguish the psychological and ethical significance of happiness:

[In its psychological meaning, happiness] connotes a mental state of satisfaction or contentment that consists simply in getting whatever one wants. Sometimes we *feel* happy because our wants at that moment are satisfied; sometimes we *feel* unhappy because our wants at that moment are frustrated or unfulfilled. . . . In that meaning of the word "happiness," as the word "feel" that I have italicized above indicates, happiness and unhappiness are psychological phenomena of which we can be conscious and have experience. Not so, when the word is used in its ethical significance. Then the word connotes something that we are *never conscious of and cannot experience at all* [emphasis added]. It also connotes something that *never exists at any one moment of our lives* [emphasis added], and does not change from time to time. . . . A good life is a temporal whole. It does not exist at any one moment. It occurs with the passage of time and over a span of time.

However strange the italicized phrases may seem to those of us trained to think in operational terms, we must be grateful to a discipline that can put a problem so sharply in focus. The difficulty of measuring QOL is here clearly in evidence. Precisely because people may want what is not in their best interests, and be happy when they attain it and dissatisfied when they do not, measurements of the extent to which people feel happy or unhappy may not validly represent happiness in its ethical significance, or "quality-of-life" as we may want to understand that concept.

Must we, then, eschew all assessments of subjective satisfaction? In the absence of specific criteria for telling them apart, the philosopher's distinction between "real" and "apparent" goods, or needs and wants, is not helpful for our purposes. We all need food yet, under normal circumstances, who can say with certainty that this individual, at this time, needs this particular piece of bread, or meat, or fruit? As evidenced by the changing signals we receive from experts in, it seems, every domain of knowledge, we are a long way from having the information that can tell us what our human nature truly needs—how much, if any, of this or that nutrient, how much, if any, stress, challenge, pain, joy, strenuous physical exercise, or sleep.

Under the circumstances we must proceed on two fronts, recording both subjectively experienced satisfaction and objective indicators of well-being, to the extent that the objective can be specified. The philosopher's distinction between happiness in its ethical significance and happiness in its psychological sense remains a constant reminder to seek criteria other than subjective satisfaction for assessing QOL. As marketers dedicated to finding out and making available what people want, we cannot fail to note the philosopher's point that getting what one wants may not lead to happiness in its ethical sense. I must postpone further consideration of this issue, noting here only that, over the long haul, a significant contribution of the marketing discipline to understanding and measuring QOL is likely to be the information that marketers generate on the actual circumstances of individual human lives. On a proprietary basis and somewhat unsystematically, this information is currently obtained as an essential aspect of marketing practice.

## **ONCE AGAIN: WHAT IS MARKETING?**

For present purposes, we need a clear conception of marketing activity. The topic "What is marketing?" was last discussed intensively in the context of marketing's "broadening" (e.g., Kotler, 1972). Discussion tapered off about ten years ago, due less to the emergence of a compelling resolution than to a simple loss of steam. Among the more concrete signs that our discipline is not yet adequately grounded are the following: (1) Generally, authors have not taken up the challenge posed by Ben Enis' (1973) call for a "deepening" of marketing. (2) Textbook presentations of marketing—for example, the oft-repeated progression from selling orientation to marketing concept to societal marketing to social marketing—have not been matched at the level of formal representation. To the extent that models of marketing exist, it is selling, rather than the marketing concept, that is modeled (Fennell, 1983). (3) In the world of marketing practice, the distinction between selling and marketing is crystal clear to marketing professionals who daily confront pressures to revert to selling, and who find in the literature little, beyond lip service, to support their efforts to engage in marketing. (4) Similarly, while few would want to turn back the clock on marketing's "broadening," the idea of including advocacy of social causes

within marketing's domain has introduced a gigantic internal contradiction. Two radically different approaches to behavioral influence, namely, advocacy persuasion and marketing persuasion, are both to be regarded as "marketing." They implicate fundamentally different persuasive objectives and behavioral tasks, which roughly parallel a selling orientation and a marketing orientation, respectively. Both may be accommodated under the same roof only in the sense that each kind of assignment should commence by conducting a marketing analysis, i.e., articulating the behavioral implications of attempting to effect influence in a universe of interest. But there is no reconciling the models of persuasion that underlie advocacy and marketing (Fennell, 1982c, 1983).

Much scholarly and practical work in marketing can proceed in the absence of clarification of the subject's scope or resolution of inherent contradictions. But, without prior clarification, it is not possible to discuss the ethical implications of an activity that is, or may be, defined in mutually exclusive ways. Since there is, among marketing scholars, some support for the notion that the chief subject matter of our discipline is exchange, let us first consider exchange in each of two contexts and then concentrate on the implications of one of these contexts. But for present purposes, we will need more than a simple equating of marketing with one model of exchange. In discussing marketing ethics, the purpose is not to create new moral virtues. Rather, the objective is to bring existing ethical sensitivities to bear in the particular circumstances that arise in carrying out marketing tasks. We need to know who are the players and what are the circumstances. We need to know who is affected by whom, under which conditions. Accordingly, discussion of the essential nature of marketing exchange is followed by analysis of the background conditions in which marketing occurs in today's society.

## Two Contexts for Exchange

The contexts in which exchange occurs may differ from each other in ways that significantly alter the fundamental nature of the transaction. It is essential, then, that authors be specific about the assumed context for exchange; in general, marketing authors have not been. Authors may be able to recognize their tacit assumptions in the elements that Exhibit 4.2 assembles under the headings of *P* Exchange and *Q* Exchange. The bases for distinguishing two contexts for exchange are shown as row headings, and the corresponding *P* and *Q* assumption is entered in the appropriate column. Abundance in some sense is a prerequisite to engaging in exchange (rows 1, 2): In the case of *P*, an existing surplus is available for exchange; in the case of *Q*, creating a surplus for the purpose of engaging in exchange is contemplated. Considering societal function (rows 3, 4): *P* exchange emphasizes distribution, while *Q* exchange emphasizes production of goods/services (row 3), with corresponding implications for resource management and want-satisfaction (row 4). Considering business function (rows 5–8): the student of exchange assumes, in the *P* model, that decisions about the

**Exhibit 4.2**  
**Two Contexts for Exchange**

	MODEL P	MODEL Q
1. RELATIONSHIP WITH SURPLUS	DISPOSE OF SURPLUS i.e., surplus given	CREATE SURPLUS i.e., surplus planned
2. ORIGIN OF SURPLUS	OUTSIDE SYSTEM e.g., bountiful nature	WITHIN SYSTEM e.g., produced by division of labor
3. SOCIETAL FUNCTION	DISTRIBUTE OUTPUT OF PRODUCTIVE ENTERPRISE	PRODUCE/OFFER WHAT USERS WOULD MAKE FOR SELVES
4. WASTED RESOURCES & UNMET WANTS	IF OTHERS DON'T WANT YOUR SURPLUS	IF ERR IN ASCERTAINING/REALIZING USERS' WANTS
5. RELATIONSHIP WITH PRODUCTIVE OUTPUT	GOODS/SERVICES TO BE SOLD	GOODS/SERVICES TO BE DESIGNED/ORDERED
6. RESOURCE ALLOCATION (WHAT TO PRODUCE)	RESPONSIBILITY OF PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT	RESPONSIBILITY OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT
7. POINT OF ENTRY FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING	POST-PRODUCTION	PRE-PRODUCTION
8. ENTREPRENEURIAL TASK	FIND BUYERS	MAKE APPROPRIATE PRODUCTIVE DECISIONS
9. IMPLICIT MODEL OF EXCHANGE	INTERPERSONAL e.g., swapping, bartering	INTERROLE -- resources for changed state
10. RELEVANT DYAD	SELLER-BUYER	USER-PRODUCER
11. APPROACH TO INFLUENCE	"THIS SERVES YOUR PURPOSES."	"WHAT ARE YOUR PURPOSES?"
12. PERSUASIVE TASK	"I WANT TO SELL YOU THIS."	"I WANT ONGOING EXCHANGES."
13. FOCUS FOR BASIC SCIENCE	INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE	CONDITIONS OF WANT-OCCURRENCE & SATISFACTION
14. BASIC DISCIPLINE(S)	BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE(S)	BEHAVIORAL, PHYSICAL, BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES



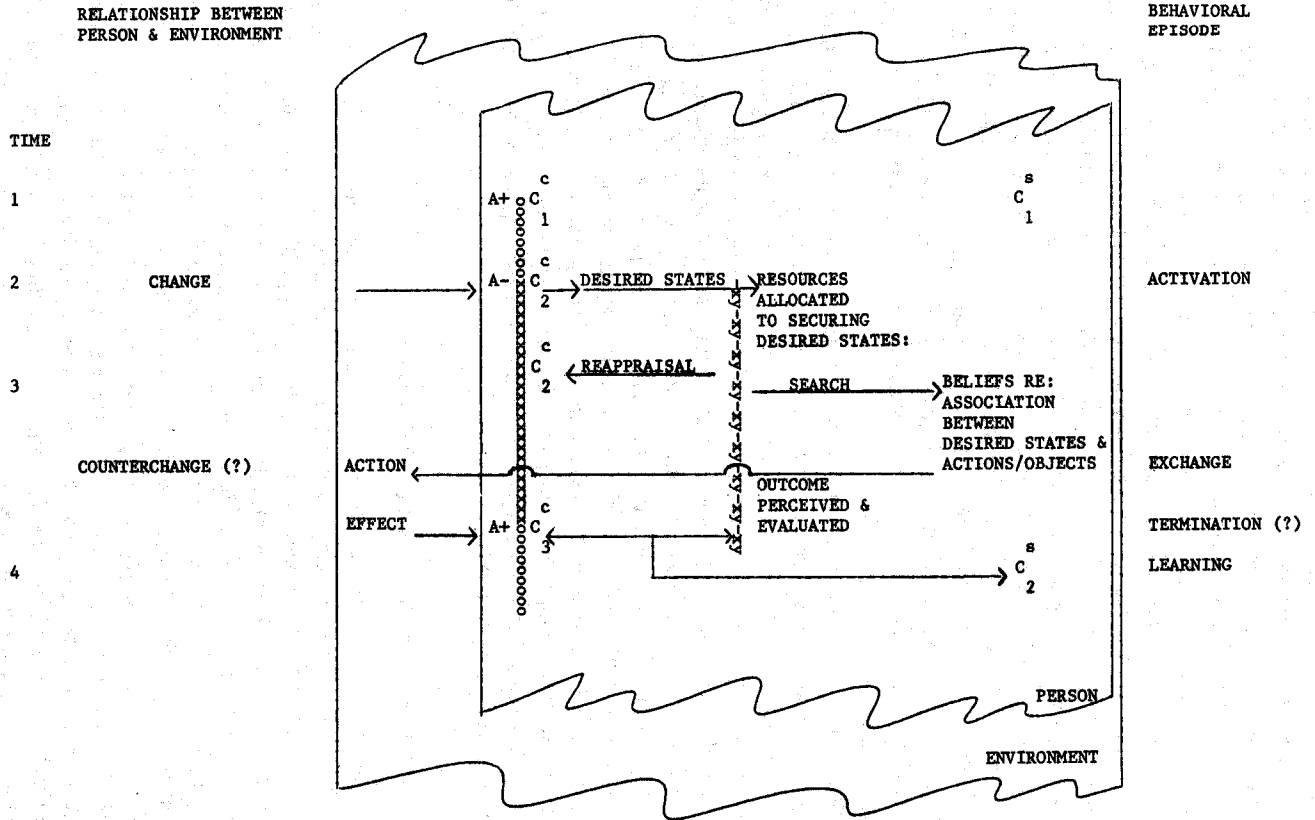
kind of goods/services to be exchanged are outside the present system and that the task is to find buyers; and in the *Q* model, that decisions about the kind of goods/services to be exchanged are within the present system and that the task is to make appropriate decisions about what will be designed/ordered. Considering behavioral influence (rows 9–12): *P*'s implicit model of exchange is interpersonal and *Q*'s is inter-role—an individual acting as producer and as user, who exchanges resources for a changed organismic state (row 9); in *P*, the relevant dyad is seller-buyer and the corresponding persuasive mode is advocacy, i.e., urging acceptance for something whose existence has come about without reference to the buyer's circumstances; in *Q*, the relevant dyad is user-producer, and the corresponding persuasive mode is marketing, i.e., ascertaining the user's circumstances in order to ensure ongoing exchanges (rows 10–12). Finally, considering the domains of science to which students of exchange would turn for help (rows 13, 14): in the *P* model, it is social science addressing the subject of interpersonal influence; in the *Q* model, it is the behavioral, physical, and biological sciences studying the conditions of want-occurrence and want-satisfaction.

Recall that the marketing concept may be stated: Don't sell what you happen to make; make what the customer wants to buy. *Q* rather than *P* would seem to be closer to the spirit of the marketing concept, which is unambiguously concerned with productive decisions ("make what . . ."). Accordingly, as I proceed to consider the ethical implications of marketing, as well as the relation between marketing and QOL, I have in mind a kind of exchange that is embedded in the context of the *Q* model. For present purposes, the most interesting feature of that context is its implicit model of exchange which, in the *Q* case, is *inter-role*. Analysis of the ethical implications of marketing must be addressed to the specific activities that flow from participating, or trying to participate, in this inter-role exchange. Accordingly, the nature of marketing exchange must first be examined in some detail.

### Marketing's Implicit Model of Exchange

Essentials of a primitive inter-role exchange are represented in Exhibit 4.3, which depicts schematically an individual in an environment of space and time. The individual is represented by two systems only, affective (*A*) and cognitive (*C*); the current (*C*<sup>c</sup>) and storage (*C*<sup>s</sup>) aspects of the cognitive system are represented separately. The individual is to be considered at each of four instants of time (*T*<sub>1</sub> to *T*<sub>4</sub>). Reading down, at *T*<sub>1</sub>, the individual experiences a positive or neutral affective (*A*<sup>+</sup>) state which, at *T*<sub>2</sub>, has changed to an unpleasant state (*A*<sup>-</sup>) because of an intervening change in the relationship between the individual and the environment. It is immaterial here whether the circumstances (activating conditions) that give rise to the changed relationship affect the cognitive (*C*<sup>c</sup>) or affective (*A*) system first. One may become aware that one is uncomfortable and search for the reason (*AC* order), or one may receive information which, on reflection, makes one uncomfortable (*CA* order). At *T*<sub>2</sub>, the individual imagines

# Exhibit 4.3 A Model of Inter-role Exchange



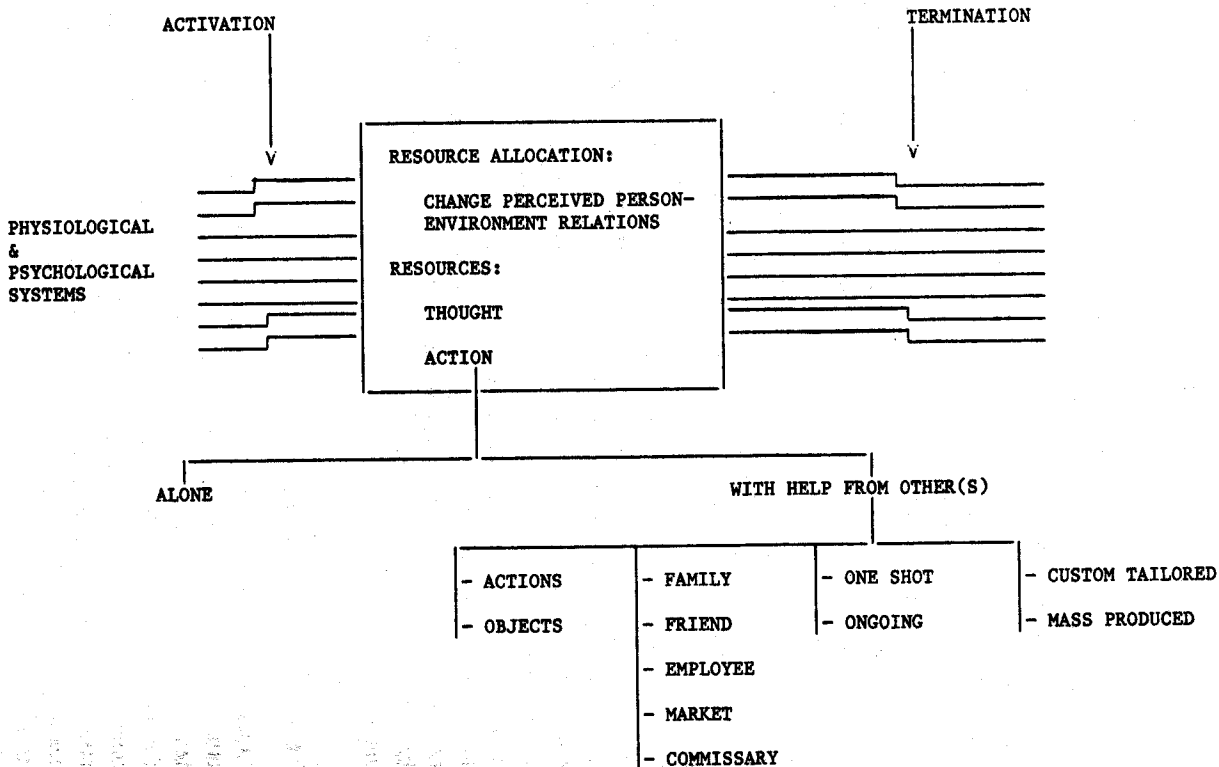
a state ( $-xy$ ) that lacks the unpleasant external and internal elements associated with the activating change (desired states), and the individual's resources are allocated to making desired states a reality. Thought and action are the two kinds of resources available to the individual. Sometimes thought alone is effective. For example, upon examination, conditions previously thought to be upsetting may be viewed as harmless. In the present case, at  $T_3$ , we are assuming that reappraisal has not been effective in restoring an acceptable affective state. Action, i.e., making some environmental adjustment to counter the activating change, is going to be necessary. Stored in the individual's memory is information about actions/objects that were availing in similar circumstances in the past (beliefs), which permit the individual to generate one or more candidate actions/objects. (Appropriately modified, the model also represents cases where the individual possesses no relevant information, a variation that need not be pursued for present purposes.) We assume here that the action the individual selects produces an effect that restores a state of acceptable affect ( $A^+$ ). Whether or not affect remains negative following action, the cognitive storage system ( $C_2^s$ ) is different in some way at  $T_4$  compared with  $T_1$ , minimally by virtue of registering the outcome of attempted change. The store of information available for use in the future has been increased.

Once the individual chooses action as a means of restoring acceptable affect, additional options follow. One may act alone or in collaboration with others. Various kinds of collaborative arrangements are depicted in Exhibit 4.4. The individual may have another person either effect the necessary adjustment (services) or supply some object that will be helpful (goods). The kind of relationship with the other may be that of friend, family member, employee, trading partner, commissary; the arrangement may be one-time or ongoing; one may seek standardized or custom-tailored assistance. Regardless of the specific collaborative form used, the essential nature of an inter-role exchange remains unchanged: an individual experiences an unpleasant state of affairs that may be ameliorated through some environmental adjustment, and proceeds to try to effect counterchange.

### **Enter: Division of Labor**

Quite apart from any marketplace, humans and animals, too, use their resources to bring about change. From time to time they feel uncomfortable and they do something that makes them feel comfortable again, for example, moving into the shade out of a hot sun or strong light; brushing an ant off one's foot; when hungry, finding and eating food growing wild; when thirsty, cupping one's hand to drink water from a stream. It is this primitive exchange in which marketers seek to participate. In these cases, the individual is both user and producer, first experiencing change and a need for counterchange, then selecting a means of effecting counterchange, doing what seems to be required, and, very possibly, achieving a desired result. All our elaborate productive enterprise is designed,

**Exhibit 4.4**  
**Resource Use Within the Person: Activation and Termination**



ultimately, to participate in this primitive exchange, to offer the good/services that will bring about states people want to attain. It is marketing's task to describe all of the myriad circumstances of individual lives in which people experience a need for adjustment, and to help to design and make available aids for doing so. Much marketing research, both qualitative and quantitative, is directed to identifying and assessing the incidence of significant elements in the lived world of prospective users. Only by understanding the conditions that prompt people to make counterchange is it possible to design, produce, and promote appropriate offerings.

Years ago society opted for division of labor. There seemed to be obvious advantages in a system of production based on specialization. Skill, time, and machines could be used to better advantage, and the result would be a larger productive output than is possible if individuals try on their own to make all the things they need in order to live a good life. But a central problem of this development went unnoticed. When individuals make for themselves what they want to use, they switch back and forth between their roles as users and producers. While division of labor makes it possible to improve society's efficiency in producing things and in mastering *how* to produce, it severs the user's direct influence over *what* is produced. Our productive enterprise can readily make food, and houses, and furniture, and soap, and vacation resorts, and health and beauty aids, but *which kinds* will it make? Plainly, producers face countless options and corresponding decisions. Who is charged with ensuring that those decisions are relevant to users' circumstances—that they are guided by information about the use-contexts that generate the need for production in the first place? Society assigns the task to marketing.

### Conditions for Want-Occurrence and Satisfaction

In a word, it is the task of marketing as a business activity to ensure a productive output that is responsive to the conditions of people's lives. Correspondingly, marketing science stands at the interface of the behavioral sciences, on the one hand, and the physical and biological sciences, on the other, directing the study of two interfaces between the psychological and nonpsychological worlds: one that results in want-occurrence, i.e., the directed activation of human energies ("change" in Exhibit 4.3), and a second that may result in want-satisfaction, i.e., an adjustment that terminates an episode of energetic allocation ("counterchange" in Exhibit 4.3).

To perform the task, marketers need to learn about and understand activating conditions, i.e., those changes in person-environment relations that allocate individuals' resources to effecting counterchange. Exhibit 4.3 presents an abbreviated version of a more comprehensive model (e.g., Fennell 1980b, 1982c) in which instrumental action is represented as a means of effecting counterchange. The aspect of the environment that a specific action involves and the kind of change indicated are already given as a component of activating change, of

which I have described five simple and two complex cases (Fennell, 1978): conditions occur from which we want to escape (*current problem*); we imagine imminent conditions that we wish would not occur (*potential problem*); in many aspects of our lives, systems run down and need to be maintained (*normal depletion*); when we are otherwise at ease, some thought or occurrence engages our interest (*interest opportunity*), or desire for sensory pleasure (*sensory pleasure opportunity*), and we feel uncomfortable until we respond further. In each case, the available actions may entail their own discomfort (*action-related problem*), or there may be no appropriate action available (*satisfaction-frustration*). Each of the simple activating conditions (Exhibit 4.5) emphasizes one kind of condition that prompts an individual to act or to use a good/service. The two complex conditions describe cases where, in addition, an activating element is present whose direction opposes the direction activated in simple cases—because of undue cost, time, effort, discomfort (*action-related problem*), or because appropriate actions or objects are not available (*satisfaction-frustration*). In sum, the different activating conditions represent variations in the kinds of conditions in which departure from an acceptable affective state occurs.

#### Exhibit 4.5

#### Activating Conditions and Corresponding Behavioral Direction

<u>PERCEIVED ACTIVATING CONDITION</u>	<u>DIRECTION FOR BEHAVIOR</u>
<u>SIMPLE</u>	
1. CURRENT PROBLEM	SOLVE PROBLEM
2. POTENTIAL PROBLEM	PREVENT PROBLEM
3. NORMAL DEPLETION	MAINTAIN STABLE STATE
4. INTEREST OPPORTUNITY	EXPLORE
5. SENSORY PLEASURE OPPORTUNITY	FACILITATE
<u>COMPLEX</u>	
6. ACTION-RELATED PROBLEM	RESOLVE CONFLICT
7. SATISFACTION-FRUSTRATION	RESTRUCTURE SITUATION

#### Figure and Ground

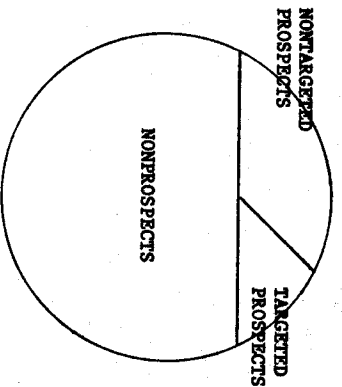
Activating conditions select the domain of substance for a counterchange that restores acceptable affect, and they allocate the individual's resources to effecting

counterchange. Producers may want to participate in the individual's attempt to effect counterchange. To do so usually requires a substantial commitment of resources, and the close involvement of the marketing function in identifying and assessing opportunities for investment. Producers face decisions at two distinct levels: Which broad class of counterchange will we address, and, within that class, which particular activating conditions will we respond to? The first has to do with defining the universe of interest (cf. market definition), and the second with selecting a productive option within that universe (cf. brand positioning). It is important to distinguish the two classes of decision because they represent two contexts for ethical reflection on the marketing function. The essential user-producer transaction—the producer's attempt to promise and deliver value to a user—is not only a transaction between two individuals. It assumes public dimensions by virtue of the background conditions of mass manufacturing and mass media of communications. Accordingly, for ethical analysis, it becomes necessary to consider a naturally occurring population as consisting of two universes, one focal and one nonfocal. The implications of marketers' actions in distinguishing figure and ground in a naturally occurring population warrant consideration in an ethical analysis no less than do the decisions they make within the figural domain.

From the marketer's perspective, a naturally occurring population consists of nonprospects and prospects who, following study, may be further divided into targets and nontargets (Exhibit 4.6a). This simplistic statement must yield to one that more closely models reality. For marketing purposes, a naturally oc-

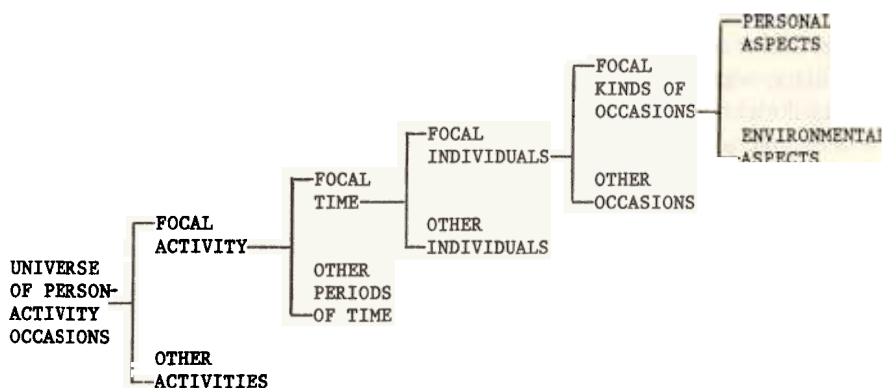
#### Exhibit 4.6 Toward Market Definition

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6a. NATURALLY OCCURRING POPULATION

## Exhibit 4.6 (continued)



## 6b. DEFINING THE UNIVERSE OF INTEREST

curring population of individuals is better viewed as a universe of person-activity occasions, extended in space and time, i.e., occasions for and single instances of generic activities performed by individuals in a particular geographic area and period of time (Fennell, 1982b). Within that universe marketers ignore some—in fact most—activities as irrelevant to their current interest and concentrate on a focal behavioral domain (e.g., feeding a dog). Similarly irrelevant are actions that belong in distant past or future time periods, and marketers identify a focal time period; within the focal domains of activity and time, initial determinations may rule out of consideration certain individuals (e.g., on the basis of age, gender, income, geographical location, media exposure, retail outlet patronage) and, possibly, certain kinds of occasion for the focal activity (e.g., informal/formal, at home/traveling). Such decisions, which are often tacitly made, carve a focal universe of person-activity occasions out of a naturally occurring population and help to define a market (Exhibit 4.6b). Within the market as defined, intensive study uncovers heterogeneous orientations to performing the focal activity, within and across prospects, and, along with other information, leads to a targeting decision (Exhibit 4.7).

The variables that determine the focal activity may be classified as permanent or transitory aspects of the person and the environment. They comprise a wide range of elements, including sensory information, beliefs, feelings, and action tendencies. These elements combine in different ways to yield the heterogeneous orientations typically found in any market as defined. The previously described



**Exhibit 4.7**  
**Toward Targeted Occasions of Use**

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UNIVERSE  
 AS  
 DEFINED

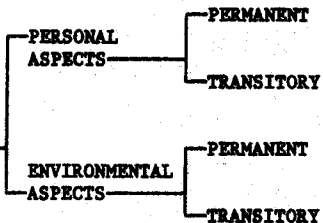
CLASSES OF  
 BEHAVIORAL  
 DETERMINANTS

ELEMENTS IN  
 HETEROGENEOUS  
 ORIENTATIONS

CLASSES OF  
 ACTIVATING  
 CONDITIONS\*  
 (DEMAND SEGMENTS)

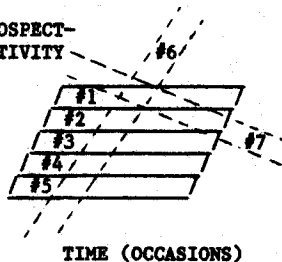
TARGETED  
 OCCASIONS  
 OF USE

FOCAL  
 PERSON-  
 ACTIVITY  
 OCCASIONS

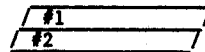


PERCEPTIONS  
 SENSORY INFORMATION  
 BELIEFS  
 RULES  
 FEELINGS

PROSPECT-  
 ACTIVITY



TARGET-  
 ACTIVITY



\*For listing, see Exhibit 4.5

activating conditions (Exhibit 4.5) represent “pure” cases that, in the real world are the building blocks for empirically described market segments.

### **Overview of User-Producer Transaction**

This, then, is the anatomy of the user-producer transaction in today’s world. In numerous substantial domains, change in person-environment relations leads people to allocate their resources to making counterchange. Given division of labor, people rely on others to help effect most of the adjustments they want to make. Very few, in fact, of the adjustments humans make are made without involving the work output of someone else—one may even buy and use a back-scratcher. Furthermore, there is no such thing as shelter, or food, or drink, or clothing, in the abstract. There are specific instances of each, which result from producers’ choosing, among numerous options, the materials, designs, and other elements they believe correspond to real-world circumstances of use.

Given mass manufacturing and mass communications media, the user-producer transaction is conducted at a distance and, impersonally, between parties who do not know each other as individuals. Marketers facilitate the transaction. First, corresponding to a domain of their organizations’ productive expertise, marketers carve a behavioral universe (a focal universe of person-activity occasions) out of a naturally occurring population. Within that universe, they study in detail the personal and environmental contexts for the focal action, with a view to developing a productive response appropriate to a subset of conditions. In attempting to optimize the productive response to those conditions, many other conditions relevant to the behavioral domain and to other substantial domains are excluded from consideration, explicitly and implicitly. Once created, however, an offering’s availability for sale is announced and, in most cases, is effected, in the presence or potential presence of all. The item is physically available for use by all, in any set of circumstances and for any humanly conceivable purpose, i.e., nontargeted as well as targeted occasions of use. In sum, goods/services that result from in-depth study of narrowly defined behavioral domains among individuals who are not representative of the naturally occurring population are widely disseminated, symbolically and physically. Making what prospective users want to buy requires standing in the user’s shoes and appreciating behavioral influences from that perspective. It demands assuming a perspective that is uniquely personal and highly specific. At the same time, the resulting goods/services are thrust on the awareness of all or, minimally, placed within the potential awareness and grasp of all, nonprospects and prospects alike. The societal arrangements that implement the user-producer transaction involve adopting a perspective that, at one and the same time, is intimately individual and totally public.

### **TOWARD FORMULATING THE USER-PRODUCER COVENANT**

Division of labor implies a covenant between users and producers, and we may ask how that covenant is to be construed. In offering to make what will

serve users' purposes, producers must attempt to understand the world from the perspective of many users; in so doing they become privy to the full range of motives that humans experience. In any substantial domain, a thoroughgoing investigation is expected to reveal that, over time and across individuals, a focal action is performed for reasons that are ignoble, frivolous, mundane, or admirable. Human beings are known at times to take revenge, to subjugate, to thwart, to ape, to act mindlessly, to succor, to create, to play. What exactly are the terms of the covenant between user and producer? When society opted for the productive benefits that flow from division of labor, did we intend to appoint producers as the judges of our purposes or did we have in mind that producers should, nonjudgmentally, help us to realize our purposes whatever they may be within the law? With regard to the latter, we cannot imagine that the covenant compels individual producers to assist users in achieving some effect that the producer finds ethically repugnant. But does it permit or require producers to adopt an agnostic stance and, as criminal defense counsel may, claim ignorance of the prospective users' guilt or innocence? In an era of mass manufacturing and mass communications, the analogy falters. A criminal lawyer cannot know with certainty the mind and heart of any one defendant. Today's producers design goods/services for segments of humanity at large and can have no reason, *a priori*, to assume away any reaction within the range of human nature.

### Background Conditions

Let me make explicit two aspects of the background conditions in which marketers operate. Comparing the user-producer transaction today and in the premachine age, we see significant differences. The transaction today is at once impersonal and public. It is conducted, at a distance, between parties who do not know each other as individuals. Except in the case of some services, producers no longer ascertain a prospective user's wants in face-to-face communication, as still may occur today with one's tailor or one's hairdresser. Marketing researchers study the circumstances of prospects and collaborate with production management in multiphase projects aimed at translating what can be learned about the activating conditions and desired states of prospects into the attributes of instrumental goods and services. Yet, however finely tuned to the specific circumstances of some prospects an offering may be, once it is made available for sale, it may be put to use for any conceivable purpose. This may be called the problem of *every occasion of use*. Moreover, although the work of marketing researchers and product designers proceeds in relative privacy, availability for sale is announced in the mass media and is effected through mass display in retail outlets. This may be termed the problem of the *ubiquitous marketplace*.

Individuals who make for themselves what they need face ethical issues as they consider how their actions may affect themselves and their neighbors. Observers may object on ethical grounds to the way they use or do not use their resources. If they make a useful discovery and enjoy its benefits in public, they may make less fortunate observers dissatisfied. The ethical analysis becomes

more complex with the introduction of division of labor and, more so still, in combination with mass manufacturing and mass communications. Ample potential for controversy exists when the action of one individual is viewed from the perspectives of others. It is multiplied many times over, as producers attempt to tailor their output to individual circumstances and yet must announce their offering's availability in the presence of all and reckon with the realistic possibility that, once it leaves their hands, their offering may be used for any conceivable purpose to which its attributes are relevant. However we formulate the terms of the user-producer covenant, we must be aware of the transaction's public dimensions in today's society.

### **Ends Versus Means**

Marketing is an activity that directs the production of goods/services to help prospective users effect counterchanges that their circumstances call for. This view of marketing readily translates into the proposition that marketers help to provide means to effect users' ends. So far, then, as the private sector goes, the productive enterprise has no productive purpose of its own beyond making, or producing the means to make, what people would make for themselves. Users are responsible for ends. The conditions, personal and environmental, that prompt users to allocate resources to effecting counterchange also specify the kind of environmental impact that is called for and that the productive enterprise is there to help them to make. Marketers guide producers in making means available. Users are responsible for choosing among available means and for the use they make of them. Society as a whole expresses its will in these matters through legislation.

We must look into the reasons why an argument of such patent face validity as the preceding is apparently not compelling. Beyond the argument's apparent logic, it gains strength from the fact that, in a free market economy, producers appear to have no legitimate means of preventing the production of goods/services that are not prohibited by law. Furthermore, if producers were to try to prevent a good/service from being produced, such arrogation of power to themselves would seem to go well beyond society's mandate. Within the realm of legally permitted activity, it is unacceptable that one segment of society should propose to tell adult individuals what they may not do. Furthermore, attempting to prevent the production of legal goods/services would fall afoul not only of antitrust laws but also of practicality. At the same time, individual producers may address the question for themselves personally and for their organizations: Am I comfortable engaging in this activity? In fact, producers engage in many different kinds of activities and face a variety of different kinds of decisions as they study want-occurrence and participate in want-satisfaction. The argument that would settle marketing's ethical issues by apportioning ends to users and means to producers is flawed by superficiality. It fails to differentiate the many dimensions of the user-producer transaction and the variety of relevant issues.

## **Ends and the Substance and Form of Means**

The concept of "means" is one source of difficulty in that it does not allow us to make the distinctions that need to be made. We need to be able to speak of the substance and form, as well as the end, of an action. Considering a human being or, in the present context, a prospective user, the term "end" refers to a psychological state of satisfaction or acceptable affect that an individual may bring about by means of action. Within and across individuals, there are many different conditions that lead to departure from acceptable affect and, correspondingly, many different counterchanges that need to be made to restore an acceptable affective state. Each kind of counterchange can be carried out in different ways. Goods/services are intended to bring about a state of satisfaction by helping people to make appropriate counterchanges. Some of the many different ways of making the same kind of counterchange are reflected in different products, and product forms, and brands within products. For example, reducing or controlling underarm odor may be achieved by bathing/showering; using bath soap/deodorant soap; using underarm deodorants in cream/stick/roll-on/spray form; various brands within form; within and across individuals, various movements; and various patterns of scheduling/frequency. In the present analysis, then, instrumental actions and objects, including goods/services, are means to the end of restoring an acceptable affective state. Regarding such means, we may usefully distinguish substance (e.g., reducing or controlling underarm odor) and form (e.g., the various actions/objects mentioned above). Both substance and form may be stated at varying levels of abstraction/specificity, and, in practice, producers seek ever more detailed information about substance in order to optimize form.

Ultimately, understanding substance in specific instances depends on understanding the elements that constitute activating change and the counterchange that it calls for. For example, consider an individual who believes that he perspires more than do most folk and who dislikes the sensation of wetness and the feeling of being poorly groomed that accompanies the sensation. These considerations along with the physical and physiological components are the activating elements in his case. They contribute to what is for him an unacceptable affective state. His "end" is to replace unacceptable affect with an acceptable affective state. His "means" to that end comprises (1) substance, i.e., the substantial domain of perspiring in all its physical and social multidimensionality and whatever kinds of things he can do to deal with his condition and (2) form, i.e., the specific actions/objects that he can use in trying to make things right in the substantial domain. Over the course of a day or a life, many substantial domains are implicated in causing departures from, and restoring, a state of acceptable affect. Within a domain there is usually a variety of specific actions/objects that can be used. Because what is at issue here is a psychological being who tries to maintain an acceptable psychological state, psychological and nonpsychological components are present in both the substance and form of means.

Customarily, people refer to a substantial domain in the language of counterchange, e.g., controlling underarm perspiration, causing a fast-acting fatal injury to human or animal. Compared to an observer, the actor has privileged access to a fuller appreciation of the nature of the substantial domain, which may include insight into elements of activating change. But, of course, actors may not be able to articulate all that they know, and they may not know everything there is to know about the relevant activating elements. Clearly, as regards the purely physical elements, e.g., body chemistry, in the case of "problem" perspiration, various experts are likely to know much more than the actor.

Social comment is sometimes directed to substance, sometimes to form. With regard to causing fatal injury to humans or animals, society may express its will in the form of laws about the circumstances in which it is permissible to do such a thing. Accordingly, producers make offerings available that permit certain kinds of things to be done that may, under certain circumstances, be illegal. In their announcements of availability for sale they promote their offering in the context of circumstances that are legal. There is a fairly high probability that, considering a producer's entire output of such items, some will be used for evil purposes.

Sometimes form, rather than substance, is the object of restriction as in the case of hand guns in certain places. For some people, and in some countries, alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, birth control devices, and abortion services appear to trigger feelings of profound indignation and the demand that others, who may not share such feelings, be denied access to these goods/services. In some instances, a compromise of sorts exists whereby production and sale are permitted but promotion is restricted. It is not at all clear that such a compromise reflects a coherently argued ethical position rather than an expedient to avoid dealing with protesters. Note that in the absence of a thoroughgoing analysis of the rights and duties of the various interested parties, the position with the most vocal advocates is likely to prevail on prudential grounds. It is certainly conceivable that, in some circumstances, the ethical stance would require accepting adverse publicity in the interest of an overriding value.

### **Toward Identifying the Issues**

We need to know more about the kinds of issues that arise when producers respond to the conditions that prompt users to effect counterchange. The activating conditions (Exhibit 4.5) are stated at a level of generality that cuts across the various domains of substance. They are a useful framework for exploring ethical dimensions of division of labor, given today's background conditions for the productive enterprise.

A large proportion of the productive enterprise is devoted to responding to the two activating conditions, normal depletion and current problem. *Normal depletion* represents all those aspects of everyday life where systems are seen to need periodic attention to keep them functioning. Examples are: providing

one's body with food, liquid, sleep, cleansing, and other grooming on a recurrent basis; providing manufactured aids to living, such as cars, houses, clothing, with what it takes to keep them functioning and in good repair; alleviating major and minor pains and ills as they occur. *Current problem* represents a differentiation or exacerbation, actual or perceived, of the conditions that call for ongoing maintenance. In regard to these two kinds of behavioral activation, technological advances have substituted other resources for the use of human muscle and time, and have reduced the amount of physical pain that humans must experience. Most people welcome this trend both in the individual goods/services that are its short-run manifestation and in the increased amount of discretionary time that is one of its longer term effects. Whose responsibility is it (1) to measure this trend, (2) to monitor its cumulative effects on physical and psychological well-being, both concurrent effects (i.e., across activity) and sequential effects (i.e., within one activity over time), and (3) to model its future determinants?

Another aspect of these two activating conditions involves the attempts of parents to get their children to do things the adult world considers to be important such as brushing teeth and eating breakfast. More broadly, the point at issue here is the caretaker/receiver relationship. Marketers who serve such users must consider the circumstances of both parties—the child who, presumably, needs to eat breakfast/brush its teeth and the parent who must see that the activities are performed. Some parents are likely to appreciate offerings that help them to get the job done, and there will be occasions when getting the job done will seem to be more important than the nutritional value of the food or the cleansing power of the toothpaste, toothbrush, and amount of attentive brushing. Are marketers to ignore such occasions of use out of concern that some parents will take the easy way out too often? Caretaking involves the possibility of conflict of interest between the parties and adds a complicating factor to those already present in the producer's attempt to participate in a user's actions.

*Potential problem* represents conditions where an individual focuses on the symbolism or social meaning of actions/objects. Unless they act in a particular way, individuals believe that some aspect of their social relationships will be unsatisfactory. Their orientations here are focused on how they appear in their own eyes or believe they may appear in the eyes of significant others. Marketers investigate the content of such beliefs among prospective users in order to help producers fashion goods/services appropriately. When their work is done thoroughly, marketers will have uncovered the full range of thoughts and wishes that humans can have about each other and about anything that is capable of personification. Within the range of action that the law permits, ought producers to reflect human wants as they determine them to exist or ought they to favor some and ignore others? If producers are to act as arbiters of acceptable motives, responding to some and not to others, where is the line to be drawn between acceptable and unacceptable? The line is a fine one. Denigrating another individual and airing another's flaws and weaknesses may be arrogant, cruel, and distasteful to behold. Yet, depending on the context, belittling another might be

the vindicating act, to the applause of the gallery, of formerly misused individuals who, finally successful in asserting their rights, confound their oppressor. Consider the greeting card business. Major producers have tended to ignore the full range of human motives for sending verbal messages. They have either failed to grasp the opportunity to serve the motives of certain segments of demand (e.g., to insult, humiliate, reprimand, denigrate) or, if they have chosen to produce preprinted verbal messages appropriate to such purposes, have refrained from featuring socially undesirable motives explicitly in marketing communications. More likely than not, producers draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable motives on the basis of prudential considerations, e.g., they may not want their brand to be associated with what may look like the nasty side of human nature.

As with most issues of marketing, the question may be considered at the level of actual goods/services or information about goods/services. In principle, we could be talking here about (1) the producer's decision to commit resources to satisfying a particular want, and (2) the necessity, later on, of communicating availability for sale in mass media. In practice, it is probably only in regard to the resource-allocating decision that the question may be raised for ethical consideration. When the issue arises at the state of communicating availability for sale, ethics may take second place to prudence. In print ads or in the opening seconds of a television commercial, it is customary to depict the targeted motivation as a means of engaging attention selectively in the media audience (Fennell, 1979). In the case of socially undesirable wishes, it may be thought not worth risking the time and resources that would have to be allocated to answering a probable public outcry, and the question of ethics may not arise. Or, if public protest seems unlikely, there is still the prudential consideration that producers simply may not want to allow the possibility of their brand's becoming associated with even the mildly undesirable side of human nature. So let me push the discussion beyond prudence to consider the resource-allocating decision. Is it ethically acceptable for marketers to include among their candidate targets and, eventually, select as target, a segment of demand where the individuals' motives, although not unlawful, are less than socially desirable? Do producers have an obligation not to participate in hurting third parties, even in ways that the law allows? Do producers have an obligation to spare people in general from exposure to what may be construed as less noble aspects of human nature? And, going beyond simply ignoring socially undesirable motives, do producers have an obligation to try to save prospective users from themselves? Should they, for example, strive actively to help people break the endless cycle of "keeping up with the Joneses"?

Two activating conditions, *interest opportunity* and *sensory pleasure opportunity*, may be termed carrot-type motivations (Fennell, 1980b) where the presence of an opportunity for cognitive/sensory pleasure may make individuals feel deficient and prompt them to allocate resources to trying to experience the particular satisfaction that is offered. The opportunity to do puzzles and to enjoy



delectable nonessential foods are examples. Within the law, adults are free to allocate their time to activities as they see fit. In an ethical review, we may raise the question as to whether individuals who wish to enjoy such activities and are ready to spend their resources in supporting, for example, the availability for sale of video games and chocolate candy should also be willing to commit resources to help individuals who find moderation difficult to achieve, i.e., for whom access to such items results in disproportionate use to the extent of interfering with their ability to function normally. Similarly, do the producers who make such "carrots" available share the users' responsibility? The point at issue here raises an aspect of the time dimension beyond those mentioned earlier, namely, the proportion of an individual's time that is devoted to some activity. Where the availability of a product permits exercising human intellectual and sensory capacities in a way that was not previously available (as do, for example, objects of art, opportunities for gambling, taste-appealing nonnutritional food/drink), it is possible that some individuals may do so disproportionately—in the objective sense of according more time than before to activity that the product permits and, possibly, in the evaluative sense of according more time than is proper on some criterion of the person's own good or responsibilities.

In the basic behavioral model, the activating condition, *action-related problem*, represents the fact that, beyond the cost that any action implicates, attempting to effect counterchange sometimes incurs severe costs and an additional source of behavioral activation. In the marketing application, action-related problem represents problems that some people may perceive to exist in the goods/services offered for sale. For example, an offering that has been designed to address motivating elements such as those previously discussed is itself a source of behavioral activation in certain circumstances. Caffeine in coffee is one example. In most if not all product categories, brands exist that were developed in response to these product-related problems, e.g., decaffeinated coffee, low cholesterol margarine, hypoallergenic toiletries, gas economical cars, low calorie foods and drinks, power steering in cars, lightweight pressing irons, easy to swallow medicinal capsules, nonspill cough mousse. Ethical questions, similar to those raised above in connection with normal depletion and current problem, are relevant here too. Whose responsibility is it to study and raise questions about lowering the general level of tolerance for pain, discomfort, or stress, or the general level of muscle tone?

Finally, *satisfaction-frustration* represents cases where individuals experience one or more of the kinds of activation already discussed but know of nothing they can do to effect counterchange. When they can find them, producers mine such cases as a rich source of ideas for new positionings, new brands, and new products. Whose responsibility is it (1) to record the low-incidence conditions that no producer responds to because response is economically impractical at this time, or (2) to identify and respond to those individuals whose allergic reactions or other idiosyncrasies make it impossible for them to benefit from the goods/services the majority enjoys? Is it anyone's responsibility to ensure that

human wants are not neglected on the ground that the numbers of individuals who experience them are low? In those cases where it is practicable to do so, is it enough that individuals can have goods/services altered to suit their special needs at their own cost or should that cost be shared by all users? As noted before, we may consider the ethical implications of applying a strict criterion of return on investment, or we may enlarge our perspective, to consider the public manner in which the user-producer transaction is effected in today's society. Do people have an absolute right to enlist the productive enterprise on their behalf? Does this right, if any, gain potency from the heightened sense of deprivation that the ubiquitous marketplace may engender?

## ELEMENTS FOR A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This brief overview of the kinds of conditions in which wants arise shows that the subject of using resources to satisfy wants is multifaceted and, within facets, multidimensional. The analytic task is similarly complex. Costs and benefits coexist among the outcomes of action and give rise to ethical dilemmas. Costs and benefits may arise in a number of different ways and from producers acting as well as failing to act.

*Producers Respond to User-Wants.* First, considering different kinds of cost/benefit outcomes that may arise from producers responding to the wants of some prospective users: (1) The immediate outcome benefits the user but the possibility exists of hidden harm to users, or others through the users; (2) the outcome is beneficial to users in some circumstances but possibly harmful in others, e.g., because of changes in personal or environmental conditions; (3) the outcome is beneficial for some users but possibly harmful for other users—these others may be individuals whose personal or environmental circumstances are such as to render what is beneficial or harmless for others actively harmful for them, or they may be individuals who are in the care of users who may benefit at their expense; and (4) the outcome may "benefit" the user by enabling the user to hurt third parties.

*Producers Do Not Respond to User-Wants.* Producers may decide against responding to certain kinds of wants whose existence they have uncovered. For example, producers may consider that the likely level of return precludes them from serving prospective users (1) who experience rare conditions for which the individuals would wish goods/services were available or (2) who experience common conditions for which goods/services are available but whose rare adverse reactions to available offerings prevent their using them.

Other considerations cut across the above. Among these, (1) the ubiquitous marketplace features prominently. As a consequence of its public nature in today's society, a user-producer transaction may be thrust on the awareness of nonparticipants. Consider the following as just one instance of such a state of affairs. In the case of an action that is performed repeatedly, a fair standard for evaluation may be an average of many instances rather than the occasions when one has not performed at one's very best. Variable performance is probably the

rule rather than the exception in the case of many of the repetitive activities of everyday living. Producers who are responsive to user circumstances will have recorded such a pattern of variable quality of performance and may adapt their offerings accordingly. Some offerings on the market may have been specially tailored for those occasions when one is "cutting corners." By publicizing offerings for such weaker moments and off-days, may producers seem to be, and are they, in fact, lowering standards? Accordingly, while serving some users, are they hurting others? Additional considerations are as follows: (2) Time considerations, in its concurrent, sequential, and proportionate aspects, are complex. (3) Given that some possibility for harm may arise in the course of providing benefits, how are harmful effects to be dealt with? Can they be prevented, attenuated, compensated for? Who is responsible for what? Producers must be involved in preventing and attenuating, but, when it comes to compensating, is it the responsibility of users to support whatever help is due to an individual injured in the process of providing benefits to others? When we speak of "producers," given the nature of the particular harm at issue, responsibility is sometimes individual, sometimes shared within one industry or a combination of industries, and sometimes spread throughout society as a whole. Once responsibility goes beyond an individual producer, then it is someone's job to set up a procedure for monitoring the possibility of harm that arises from the concurrent activities of many individual producers. What about the responsibility of the scientific community, which, by virtue of its position one step removed from the action, is well situated to engage in monitoring activities and do the conceptualizing and modeling that permits seeing, and thus taking control of, what is happening before harm has occurred?

In sum, in today's society, the ramifications of the user-producer transaction extend well beyond the mutual rights and duties associated with a simple exchange between two parties. People other than the immediate parties to the transaction are involved as observers and reactors; time considerations beyond those of any one transaction are relevant; producers, however much they may need to stand in prospective users' shoes in order to make what users will want to buy, are, in fact, separate individuals who stand in their own shoes. Producers serve users' purposes as a means of effecting their own purposes, i.e., staying in business by participating in those particular exchanges that users want to make. Within relatively broad limits, producers may select the resource-allocating conditions (i.e., users' activating conditions) to which they allocate their resources. Users, on the other hand, have their resources allocated by activating conditions that are outside their immediate control in the short run and may exercise choice only as to the manner in which they may make appropriate environmental adjustments.

### **Three Decisions for Producers**

There are, then, three rather different kinds of questions that producers ask themselves in the context of ethical concerns: (1) Do I want to participate in this

user-action? Whether or not anyone else knows or will know of my participation, is this something to which I want to be party? (2) Do I want to make this good/service available? Knowing that when I place my output for sale in the open marketplace, it may be put to any conceivable use, have I thought through its potential for unintended harm? (3) Do I want to make this idea available? Knowing, when I announce the availability of my offering in the mass media and distribute it in mass outlets, that the information embodied in these marketing communications is, in principle, universally available, have I thought through its potential for unintended harm?

With regard to the first question—Is this something to which I want to be party?—producers who allocate their resources are the context for this question. Consider the following scenario: In a naturally occurring population, some people perform an action sufficiently often so that providing an appropriate good/service is an economic proposition. The option qualifies on a criterion of return on investment, and it appears to be better than the producer's other candidate options at this time. Depending on the substantive domain, at this point a producer may face questions such as: Do I want to participate in aborting fetuses? Do I want to participate in feeding formula to infants? Do I want to participate in sending unpleasant messages to third parties? Note that in some cases it may not be the focal action itself that causes ethical concern but the producer's awareness that the context in which some people perform the focal action makes it reprehensible. Assume that in the present scenario, marketing research suggests that the market potential comes mainly from individuals who perform the focal action in morally suspect contexts. Secondarily, is the ethical analysis changed if allocating resources to this productive option is the only means of saving one's firm, the job of one's workers, and, as in a one-industry town, the existence of a community? To say that this is a decision each producer must make for him- or herself is no answer. My question asks for ethical analysis that can serve as a resource to help inform the judgment of individuals who face such decisions.

The remaining two questions posed above for producers relate to the possibility of inadvertent harm from (2) physical or (3) informational contact with goods/services. At this time, our discipline lacks a conceptual framework that helps a producer to think through methodically the sources of inadvertent hazard that could arise from actual contact with a good/service or exposure to its promotional communications. The next sections present an outline of such a framework based on the preceding analysis.

### **Toward Modeling Sources of Inadvertent Hazard**

Preventing, attenuating, and compensating for inadvertent harm that may arise in the course of carrying out legitimate marketing tasks are topics of ethical concern. A precondition for the prevention of harm is the availability and dissemination of knowledge about sources of hazard. Marketers may accumulate the requisite knowledge due to learning from experience, or to having modeled

the relevant variables and their interactions. Among the reasons why modeling is preferable to relying on experience are the possibilities of (1) preventing particular kinds of harm without waiting for someone to be hurt, (2) being able to interpret subtle warning signs that otherwise might pass unheeded, and (3) systematizing harmful outcomes that have already occurred.

At this stage in the present analysis, we are in a position to begin to outline some systematic sources of inadvertent harm that may accompany legitimate marketing endeavors. By specifying the steps marketers take in choosing the particular counterchanges they help users to make, we identify points of entry into the world for which they have *not* tailored their offering, yet within which it will exist and be widely available for use. From the previous analysis, it is clear that we must consider separately issues arising from physical contact with, and those that arise from exposure to information about, a good/service.

### **Physical Exposure**

The different kinds of activating conditions (Exhibit 4.5) and the classes of variables used to help define a market in a naturally occurring population (Exhibit 4.6) are the bases for the present analysis.

#### *Targeted Occasions of Use*

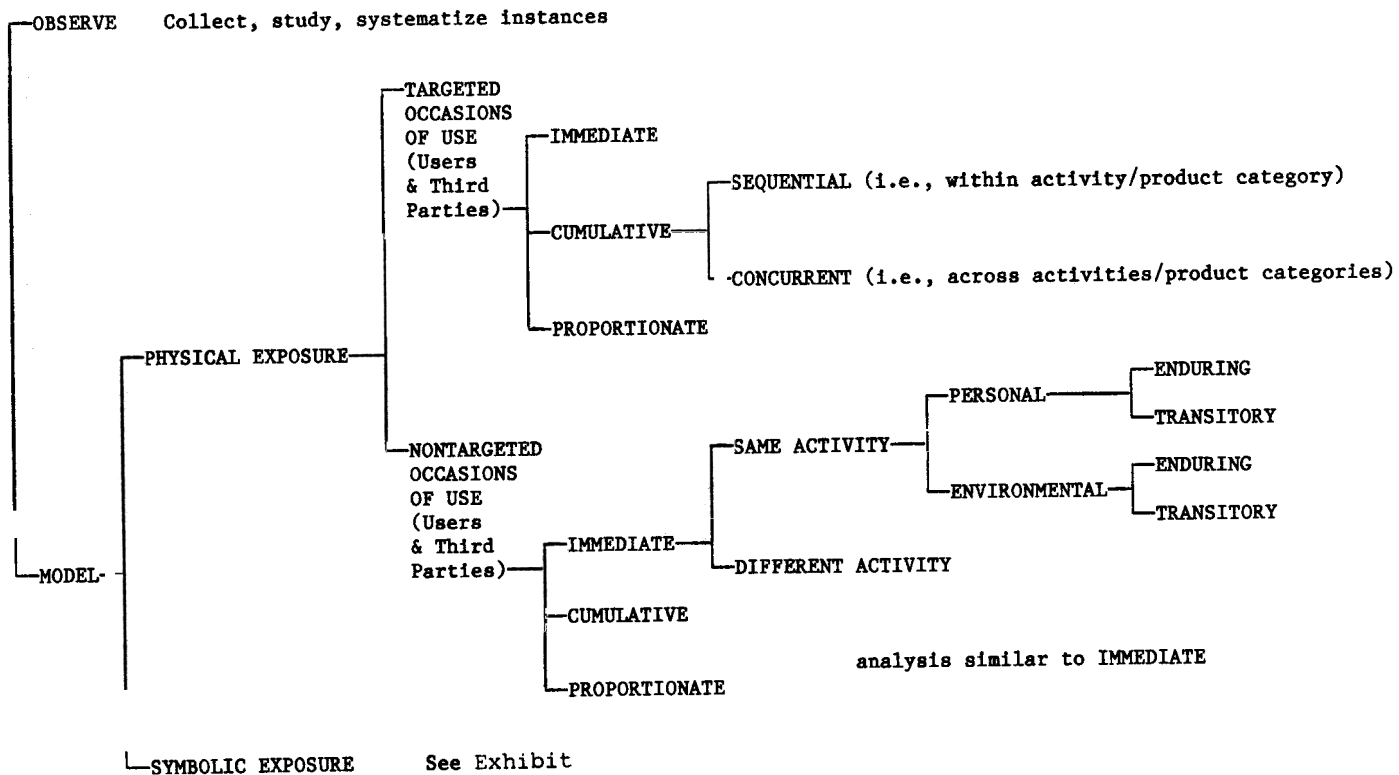
First, considering targeted occasions of use (Exhibit 4.8), producers are focusing on the benefits of helping targets to effect whatever counterchanges the activating conditions indicate, but they also want to be able to spell out, systematically, the sources of possible attendant costs to targets. In addition to harmful effects that may show up shortly after physical contact with an offering, or later, they must consider two kinds of cumulative effect: (1) sequential, i.e., arising from repeated use of one producer's good/service, and (2) concurrent, i.e., arising across activities from use of goods/services offered by producers in many product categories. Proportion is another aspect of the time dimension that needs to be considered, i.e., the proportion of an individual's time that is allocated to performing an action or using a particular good/service. The producer's concern here is to consider possibly harmful changes in proportion that may result from the availability of their offering.

#### *Nontargeted Occasions of Use*

As regards nontargeted occasions of use, even if an offering is used in conjunction with the same focal activity that marketing planners had in mind, harm may occur if the item is used by certain kinds of individuals or on certain kinds of occasions that had been excluded from consideration. Enduring characteristics of persons (e.g., allergies or alcoholism) or of the environment (e.g., poor water quality or different cultural practices), and transitory conditions of persons (e.g., a depressed state or recent ingestion of certain medications) or of the environment (e.g., an electrical storm) may render dangerous the use of otherwise harmless

Exhibit 4.8

Identifying Sources of Hazard—Physical Exposure



items. In addition, the offering may be used in conjunction with activities other than those which marketing planners had in mind. Children may play with medicine bottles and view pills as candy; adults may view a medicine capsule as a lethal weapon. And, overall, when we are searching for sources of unintended harm we must keep in mind the various aspects of the time dimension, i.e., immediate/delayed, and sequential, concurrent, and proportionate effects.

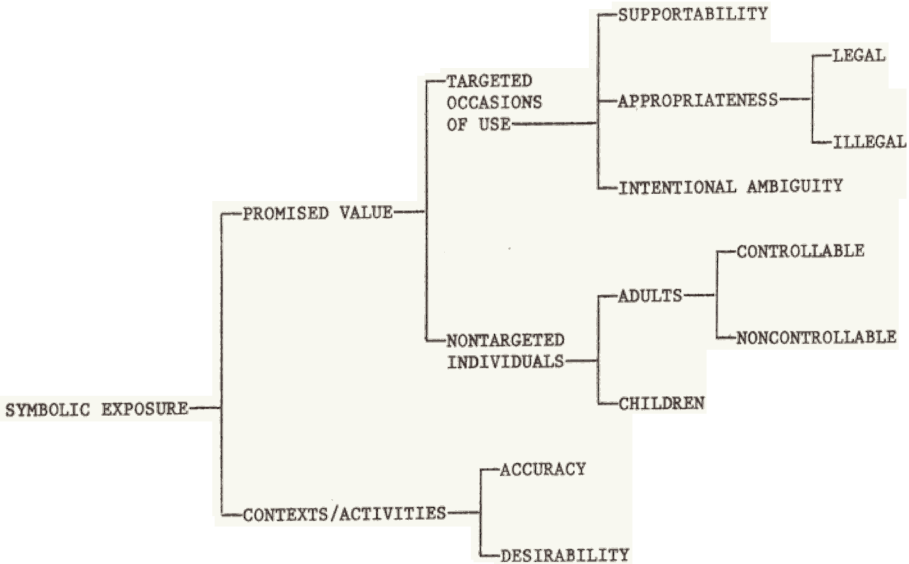
In some instances, an individual producer is not totally responsible for such inadvertent harm as may occur. One example of shared responsibility is when a buyer uses a good/service to harm a third party, who may occupy any role in relation to the buyer—from arch enemy to helpless dependent. Another occurs when one considers the effect of a particular good/service in the context of offerings from producers who are serving other focal activities in a generically similar fashion. Consider, for example, all the items that replace human muscle with nonhuman sources of energy. Finally, in the proportionate case, the potential for harm inheres in “overuse.” An individual’s infrequent indulgence in junk food or videogames is scarcely worthy of note, but is the producer who makes available the means for such lapses to share responsibility for the poor health and wasted lives of the overindulgent? Is the ethical analysis changed when the overindulgents are minors?

Shared responsibility involving other producers demands special consideration. Various kinds of resources need to be brought to bear here, including (1) conceptualizing and monitoring so that significant trends may be identified and described; (2) continuous funding so that the work can be carried on as a recognized part of the cost of doing business; and (3) assumption of responsibility by industry and academe so that the work gets done proactively. As costs are passed on, such projects will eventually be funded by users, raising two additional considerations: (4) to date, consumer education has neglected to emphasize the responsibility that users incur in availing themselves—ourselves, actually, since we all are users—of society’s productive enterprise to help effect our many purposes; and (5) the mechanism whereby all producers, large and small, share equitably in the costs of identifying and tracking such broad societal trends needs to be worked out.

### **Symbolic Exposure**

Here we consider potentially harmful consequences of being exposed to information about goods/services offered for sale, whether present in promotional material or in the public display for sale of the offerings themselves. In addition to the considerations outlined in Exhibit 4.8, there are some that relate specifically to exposure to information about goods/services (Exhibit 4.9). We must distinguish issues that relate to the substance of marketing communications, i.e., to the particular value that the offering promises to provide, from those relating to the scenarios that are used to facilitate communication of the promised value.

### Exhibit 4.9 Identifying Sources of Hazard—Symbolic Exposure



#### *Promised Value—Ambiguity in Targeted Occasions*

That an offering should deliver the value promised on the targeted occasions of use needs no elaboration here where, similarly, there is no need to discuss the question of claims that run afoul of the law. The topic of interest is whether, among those promises that can be made legally and that are supportable, there are some that should not be made on ethical grounds or, if made, that require steps to be taken to attenuate and/or compensate for potential harm. In general, the kinds of cases discussed here arise because of two features of the ubiquitous marketplace: (1) To communicate, marketers must use language and portray action, both of which are ambiguous, probably unavoidably; (2) inherently ambiguous communications are widely disseminated and thus available to be construed from multiple perspectives. The following paragraphs describe some of the consequences that may occur when ambiguous messages and multiple perspectives come together in marketing communications.

*Implied Norm.* Consider, for example, promoting candy or, indeed, food of any sort as an aid in overcoming sadness, disappointment, or other kinds of hurt that come the way of all of us, which enjoying a treat may help to soften. Stated more generally, the question here is whether an act that is unexceptionable in itself can assume undesirable qualities when depicted in mass communications. Let us ensure that the question being posed is clear. People—some percentage of us—on some of those occasions when we feel out-of-sorts, or nervous, or



anxious, or frustrated, seek relief, or escape, in some activity that we enjoy. The activity is not instrumental in dealing with the event or circumstance that has upset us, but it may help to deal with the unpleasant feeling we are experiencing. Producers are interested in providing goods/services that are helpful under these circumstances, and, in our competitive system, individual producers—of candy, ice cream, detective fiction, movies—want their brand to be selected by such people on such occasions. One way producers can attempt to secure this objective is to create an association between their brand's name and some feature of the targeted occasion so that when the circumstance occurs in real life, the target may think of using the brand in question. Although some considerations, unrelated to the present point, argue against this particular strategy (Fennell, 1979), it is one that is likely to come up for consideration. Commercials have been aired that appear to execute it. When the strategy is embodied in an advertisement, it may appear to suggest that life's problems can be or should be dealt with in an escapist manner. Perhaps only a minority of viewers understands that what is being said in marketing communications is: If life's slings and arrows have hurt you and this is one of those times when you feel that indulging yourself may ease the pain, think of enjoying our brand.

The point at issue is this: An action that is not deserving of censure and that, conceivably, is adaptive for an individual, may raise ethical concern when it is depicted in the presence of all. The action depicted in an advertisement may be the act of a healthy individual constructively dealing with the human condition or of a maladjusted one compulsively engaging in destructive behavior. Should producers refrain from making the acceptable appeal or attempt to clarify that they are speaking to one and not to the other?

*Mere Concern for Appearances.* A somewhat similar kind of problem arises in connection with another human tendency: People consider how their actions may appear in the eyes of others and choose actions that they believe enhance their social standing. The ability to inculcate concern for the good opinion of others is one of humankind's most effective means for securing socially responsible behavior. Furthermore, when individuals act in the light of concern about consequences for others, people often regard such actions as praiseworthy. Producers may tap into orientations of this kind when they find out and respond to prospects' beliefs about the kind of nutrition, or clothing, or recreation, that "good parents" provide to their offspring. People tend to applaud their friends and neighbors who try to fulfill their responsibilities as good parents, or good citizens, or appearance-conscious neighbors. The darker side of concern for the good opinion of others may be an individual with no internal reference standards or one unduly concerned about external indicia of virtue and respectability. Once again, although a producer may be talking to parents who take their responsibilities seriously, the words used in marketing communications may be compatible with nothing more than a shallow interest in maintaining appearances. Should producers take care to dissociate their promotion from mere concern with appearances?

Up to now I have been discussing cases where producers intend to target occasions of use that are unexceptionable and, in so doing, use words and scenes that some audience members may construe as depicting occasions of use that show human nature at its second best. *Unintended* ambiguity occurs because language and behavior are profoundly ambiguous. When it comes to the issue of the good or evil in human minds or, less judgmentally, to the considerations that prompt an individual to take a particular action, objective information about actions and settings may establish little of significance. Consider, now, the possibility that producers may intend or may appear to intend to use this basic ambiguity to suggest occasions that they would not wish to target explicitly because of concern over propriety.

*Intentional Ambiguity.* Let me first try to clarify a somewhat subtle consequence of society's present arrangements for the production and sale of goods/services. It arises, in part, because of the public nature of marketing communications by which messages directed to certain individuals in media audiences are exposed in the environment of all, reaching nontargets as well as targets and, in part, because of what I have referred to elsewhere as motivational ambiguity (Fennell, 1978, 1980a). Specifically, knowing what individuals strive to achieve or obtain tells us little about the circumstances that motivate their efforts. Studying for a college degree may be viewed, among others, as an acceptable cover for escaping from the demands of relatives ("Sorry, I've got a class/exam/paper to write"), as a means of bolstering a shaky social image, as a routine next step following graduation from secondary school, as an opportunity to pursue absorbing subject matter. Similarly, relaxing in a fragrant bath may be viewed, among others, as a remedy for an aching body, as appropriate behavior for one of the "beautiful people," as something one does routinely each day, or as an occasion to savor sensory pleasures. If, in announcing the availability for purchase of an aromatic bath additive or bath soap, a marketer were to say: "Let our fragrant soap leave you feeling cleansed and refreshed," individuals with any of the above orientations might consider the soap to be potentially appropriate to their particular circumstances. Similarly, Lady Macbeth might read, in those same words, a promise of ease from her nagging guilt.

The point at issue arises in the following way. Action is motivationally ambiguous, and the language in which instrumental actions and objects are described may, likewise, be motivationally ambiguous. Furthermore, marketers know that our markets comprise heterogeneous demand, i.e., that the range of circumstances in which our goods/services may be used comprises all the conceivable contexts of use. Considerations of prudence, if nothing else, would restrain marketers from promoting goods/services for nefarious uses, for example, to ease the pangs of conscience that some people might experience following the commission of acts they viewed as evil. But to what extent should marketers feel and/or be held responsible for what people may read into the language of marketing communications? Let us change product categories from soap to alcoholic beverages. Doubtless, research on the use-contexts in which bourbon

and whiskey are consumed shows that, at times, people drink to ease psychic or physical pain. Yet such contexts of use are not typically featured in liquor advertisements. Perhaps, prudential considerations suggest that it may be undesirable to associate one's brand with hard times. Or, we may read here an ethical concern to refrain from promoting alcoholic beverages as palliatives that may exacerbate difficult life circumstances. What, then, should we think of an advertisement that features an elegant highball glass containing sparkling ice cubes, whiskey ready to be poured, and the caption: "On the rocks"? Should ethical concerns have prompted the marketer to censor that particular phrase because of its possible construction as a reference to hard times? Or was the allusion intentional?

In the absence of detailed conceptualization and, eventually, data on all the possible use-contexts for the hundreds of goods/services, marketers may plausibly plead ignorance of the full range of possible constructions of their words. It is never too soon, however, to raise an issue of principle. Considerations of productive efficiency demand that marketing science move toward a state of affairs in which detailed conceptualizations as well as representative empirical data are available to guide marketing research and analysis. Once the models and the data are available, ignorance of possible constructions is no longer an acceptable excuse. Under these conditions, which are to be hoped for in the foreseeable future, what considerations and criteria should guide marketers in screening the promotional language for ethically questionable constructions?

#### *Promised Value—Exposure of Nontargets*

Next we consider issues relating to the exposure of various classes of nontargeted individuals to the various easements and enjoyments promised in marketing communications. We will treat separately possible effects on adults and on children and, among reasons why an adult may not be a target, we will distinguish those that are in some degree within the individual's control and those that are not. When we consider possible effects on nontargets, we should bear in mind that marketing communications contribute but a small portion and probably not, in the present context, the most influential portion of the picture that the communications media as a whole portray. The extent to which audiences discount the content of marketing communications because of its avowed commercial purpose is indeterminate at this time. Even though the analysis offered below applies with equal or greater force to the entire content of the communications media, that broader context is beyond the scope of this chapter.

*Economically Deprived.* Regarding individuals who find themselves to be relatively deprived economically, should marketers be concerned that the public promotion and display of goods/services beyond the reach of such individuals is unfairly or cruelly tantalizing? If so, what is the appropriate remedy? There is, of course, another view of these circumstances. In principle, the opportunity is open to all to plan and work to make money enough to buy the goods/services offered for sale. On this view, exposure to a style of living that is beyond one's

current means acts as an incentive to “better” oneself. The discomfort that one feels while being tantalized by possessions beyond one’s current reach is both the mechanism by which upward mobility is effected and the price one pays for freedom of opportunity. In rebuttal, one may argue that, psychologically, today’s have-nots are worse off by comparison with those of earlier times when relatively deprived peasants, say, may similarly have known of the riches in the manor but may have been without hope of ever acquiring wealth. Believing that one’s lot in life is not within one’s power to change may spare one from being tantalized by the possessions of others.

Today’s social critics would probably be unwilling to advocate reinstating conditions that foster the restricted horizons of the masses in earlier times. Is it an inevitable byproduct of a society that fosters or permits interclass mobility that relative have-nots experience the discomfort of being exposed to desirable goods/services that they cannot currently acquire? In seeking a balance between having care for and respecting the autonomy of one another, two additional considerations are relevant: (1) Societal arrangements must be in place to maintain a minimum living standard for all, and (2) as long as society’s arrangements for providing goods/services take the form of thrusting on us suggestions and opportunities to purchase at every turn, users and producers alike may well feel a responsibility to allocate resources to support research into the role that goods/services may play, along with other ingredients, in the pursuit of happiness. In effect, much great literature, as well as the prime-time “soaps,” make a related point, namely, mere possession of worldly goods neither brings happiness nor spares one from pain.

*Physically Deprived.* What about individuals who, for reasons clearly outside their control, cannot enjoy goods/services designed for people who do not share their handicaps? Some examples are people who have hereditary tendencies toward obesity; whose bodies, in minor or major aspects, have dimensions that are in the extreme tails of the normal distribution; who have low-incidence illnesses; who, because of allergic reactions to existing goods/services, may not enjoy the same remedies and aids to living as do the rest of us; who are left-handed. The problem at issue here arises when atypical individuals or conditions exist at such a low level in the population that a productive response becomes impractical at acceptable rates of return. The wants of such low-incidence cases are ignored, or the individuals involved find that they must pay disproportionately.

Many individuals in the categories at issue here accept their condition and the inadequate productive response to their wants. They have grown up with such a state of affairs and have known nothing else. The question for ethical review is whether, regardless of the parties’ quiescence, such individuals should suffer the total effect of their being atypical or whether some of their burden should be shared by all. We all contribute to the distribution that we use to label them “atypical.” Should those of us who are right-handed be willing, if necessary, to pay a little more for the goods we use so that left-handed people do not have to pay a disproportionately high price for products designed to suit them? Should

those of us who enjoy headache relief from over-the-counter remedies be willing to pay more so that research may be funded to find headache remedies for individuals who are allergic to currently available medications? However unintentional, there would seem to be some failure of sensitivity on the part of those of us who promote, exchange, and use products in the presence of individuals who, for reasons outside their control, cannot similarly benefit from these fruits of the productive enterprise.

*Children.* The exposure of nontargeted children to marketing communications is, of course, but a small part of the larger issue of children's exposure to the adult world, in real life and as portrayed in the communications media. The topic deserves treatment in its own right; only brief mention is made here of issues that have special relevance to marketing's societal role. An overriding concern in regard to children has to do with what the child is learning, incidentally, from the marketing communications that envelop us all. If there are undesirable effects on the formation of developing minds and characters, shielding and countering are two ways to deal with them. They have to be implemented differently depending on the age of the child. The issue then becomes one of identifying appropriate categories of minors. Unquestionably, more than one homogeneous class is involved. We must conduct an ethical analysis separately for subgroups of minors that reflect, for example, realistic assumptions about capacity for comprehension and effective parental control.

Shielding children from exposure to unsuitable material is hard to accomplish, even when guardians make an effort to do so. "Countering" refers to the dissemination of information designed to educate the young to the nature of the user-producer transaction in today's society—to the idea of heterogeneous demand and its consequences including, for example, the facts that some marketing communications and the items that they promote are responsive to prospects who are concerned about how they may appear in the eyes of other people; that others promote offerings that some people will buy and use against their own best interests; and that living in a heterogeneous society means that people and their circumstances are various and that one owes it to oneself to become informed about human nature in general, one's own nature and circumstances, and the attributes of available goods/services, with a view to exercising one's autonomy in making appropriate choices. Users and producers alike have an interest in achieving a good environment for young people to grow up in. Allocating resources to developing and disseminating appropriate educational programs would seem to be a question more of prudence than of ethics.

#### *Contexts and Activities in Promotional Scenarios*

One other aspect of the ubiquitous marketplace needs to be considered: the implications of portraying the circumstances of lives in the mass media. In order to gain the attention of targets and to help create appropriate associations for a brand, marketers often include real-life scenarios in advertisements and on packaging. I refer here to the activities and the background details used in marketing

communications, the characteristics of models, furnishings, equipment, and relationships that are portrayed. Issues relating to the accuracy and the desirability of what is portrayed need to be considered separately. And we must make a distinction between the impact and power of any one marketer, considered individually, and outcomes at a more inclusive level, which result from many marketers pursuing their individual self-interest. More inclusive outcomes may be considered at (1) the market level, i.e., for the behavioral domains that are the focus of individual marketers, e.g., pet care, taking vacations, attending concerts, and (2) the national level, i.e., considering both the sampling of behavioral domains that receive a share of commercial media and the proportion of total exposure allocated to each domain.

*Accuracy—Market Level.* Self-interest in a competitive environment, especially as it manifests itself in the strategy of market segmentation, results in pressure on marketers to seek out and portray a range of life circumstances relative to particular focal behaviors. Demand within markets is heterogeneous and, in seeking to secure a market share for one's brand, the offering a marketer develops and the content of the promotional communications likely reflect the circumstances of the appropriate segment(s) of demand. Considering well-developed markets as a whole, then, the content of marketing communications can be expected to reflect some of the variation in the circumstances of actual lives. Systematic underrepresentation may occur with respect to the circumstances of segments of demand that are numerically small; for a variety of reasons, are considered undevelopable or unprofitable; and as yet are unidentified by marketing research. Furthermore, marketers' unwillingness to present their brand in other than pleasant surroundings probably introduces a bias toward idealization. Regarding accuracy, then, at the level of individual markets, one may hope at best for a broad-brush, possibly prettified, representation of mainstream and major nonmainstream circumstances.

In addition to competitive considerations, there are forces at work in society to influence the content of marketing communications. Individual marketers appear to be fairly susceptible to influence from pressure groups. Recent experience shows that representatives of nonmainstream elements in society have not been reticent to voice their displeasure at perceived sins of omission or commission in marketing communications, and, in many cases, considerations of prudence appear to have prompted marketers to placate protesters. Feminists, seniors, and various ethnic minorities are among those who may feel that their efforts to influence the content of marketing communications have met with some success. In the domain of marketing communications, as also in regard to actual goods/services, marketing practitioners are sorely in need of conceptual tools to alert us in advance to the possibility of giving offense or displeasure.

There are, then, at least two forces at work tending to foster idealized presentations of the conditions of everyday life in which goods/services may be used. Marketers want to avoid incurring negative associations for their brands. Image-conscious representatives of elements in society that have traditionally been

disparaged or who, for other reasons, have agendas of their own are likely to object to portrayals that they consider to be unflattering. Realistically, the outcome of both forces is likely to be a tendency for marketing communications to portray idealized versions of the circumstances of everyday life.

*Accuracy—National Level.* Considering marketing communications as a whole i.e., across all markets, we may ask about the extent to which the life activities that are presented in the commercial media represent activities of actual lives. For example, on a criterion of time allocation, we should doubtless find disparities between the activities of actual lives and the activities portrayed in marketing communications. If we ask more meaningfully, do marketing communications hold a mirror up to life?, we must acknowledge that we are not equipped to answer that question at this time. The actual number of variables that are implicated is truly mind boggling. For the four broad classes of variable—people, time, physical environment, and psychological environment—we can readily see that each lends itself to numerous possibilities for classification. In just the domain of gender role portrayal, for example, the variables that may be relevant to comprehensive analysis are numerous indeed (Fennell and Weber, 1984).

In sum, as an integral part of facilitating the user-producer transaction, marketers portray aspects of human lives. We can identify forces that tend to promote and those that tend to run counter to an accurate portrayal. The actual degree of accuracy is indeterminate at the present time, and monumental conceptual work is needed to articulate the variables on which to base a comparison between real lives and lives as portrayed in marketing communications.

*Desirability.* A more provocative question remains to be asked: Is it desirable that marketing communications represent with fidelity the actual range of circumstances and of activities found at any time in a naturally occurring population? There may be a human tendency to equate what is with what must be, whether we have regard to the conditions that exist in society or to those that the communications media portray. Accordingly, the content of the communications media, if completely faithful to real life, may not only play a passive role in holding a mirror up to conditions as they exist. It may actively perpetuate the status quo. If we should consider that it is not necessarily desirable to perpetuate things the way they are, is there anyone wise enough to select "better" alternative versions? More to the point, do we know how to recognize the Wise One, and, if we do not, are we ready to assign to anyone or any societal institution the task of substantially censoring the content of our communications media?

With regard to just that portion of media content that is at issue here, individual entrepreneurs select the content of marketing communications with the intent of furthering personal and/or corporate self-interest as they perform a needed function. Marketing communications impinge on all of us whether we receive their messages passively or exert effort to avoid them. They help mold young and not so young minds. It is in society's interest to encourage monitoring and criticism of all human institutions. In the case of marketing communications, representatives of special interests have been active and, in many instances, have

found individual marketers ready to give serious consideration to their protests. Social critics, special interests, and individual marketers will benefit from a growing base of scholarly research and critical reflection. The data and conceptual frameworks that scholarship develops cannot fail to benefit all of the interested parties. Until scholarship clarifies the issues that an ethical analysis raises, we may expect prudential considerations to predominate in decisions regarding marketing communications.

## **PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MARKETING**

Before we can have anything to say about the ethics of those who engage in marketing, we must first have a clear notion of what it is that marketers do and the nature of society's charge to marketing. The need for prefatory clarification is particularly acute in the case of marketing which, in the public mind and in scholarly writings, is often equated with advertising and promotion, to the neglect of marketing's role in facilitating communication from users to producers. Society needs an institution that is charged with regaining for users access to control over what is made in their name, which they forfeit to division of labor. Society, then, charges marketing with guiding the production, distribution, and promotion of "what the customer wants to buy." The question raised in this chapter concerns the exact nature of society's charge. When we all agreed to division of labor, to specialization in production, what did we have in mind for the nature of the relationship between user and producer? What do we have in mind today, given the background conditions of mass manufacturing and mass media of communication, and a user-producer transaction involving exchange-at-a-distance that is both impersonal and public?

Questions of misrepresentation, deception, and malicious concealment which, in earlier times, may have been ethical issues between producers and users are now matters of law and prudence. The interesting ethical issues today are those that arise in articulating the nature of the user-producer covenant. Although we must be able to discuss the ethics of producers, marketers, and advertisers, it is not enough to focus on only one side of the user-producer transaction. In this connection, the ubiquitous marketplace may be a blessing in disguise—in deep disguise, some might well suggest. If we wish to view it so, it can be seen to tell users—and we all are users—that availing ourselves of the productive enterprise to aid in our purposes is a public matter whose implications are of interest to each one of us. As users, we want to find goods/services tailored to our special circumstances. But if our individual circumstances are special in some degree, they are, to that extent, different from those of others to whom we must grant a similar interest in finding what is appropriate to their special circumstances. The proliferation of goods/services that each of us regards as "unnecessary" is a likely result. Furthermore, just as it costs us effort and time to effect counterchanges on our own—to be our own producers—so there are costs involved when we choose a productive system that is based on division of labor. Among



those costs, given the present system, is the forfeiture of some measure of privacy. The loss of privacy is not individual but collective. If we are saying to producers: "Act in our name; make what we would make for ourselves; find out what that is and, when you have it ready, announce its availability in the communications media," then we are asking for human nature to be laid bare before our eyes in all its manifestations, subject only to such restrictions as are embodied in law.

Certain implications flow from placing prime emphasis on the user's purposes as the basis for the productive enterprise. It may suggest, for example, that users should be willing to pay the full costs incurred in making possible their use of particular goods/services, including whatever amounts are needed to compensate those whom the goods' availability may injure. It may also suggest that the costs of satisfying the wants of individuals whose circumstances are highly atypical—who, for example, are in the extreme tails of the normal distribution—should be shared by all in return for the privilege of receiving the help of the productive enterprise in meeting one's wants. The trend in today's technology, which is away from mass production and toward the capability for individualization, may be one way of lessening the burdens that atypicality entails.

Individual producers should, of course, be willing to assume responsibility for the necessary consequences of the decisions they take. If "necessary," as a criterion, strains our current ability to model the world in which marketers operate, so be it. For the present, at any rate, marketers try to serve the wants not of Martians or other aliens but of human beings, and the time is long past due for acting on the belief that human nature is, in principle, knowable. Other works (e.g., Fennell, 1982a, 1983, 1985a), discuss reasons why marketing academics have shown little interest in doing conceptual and empirical work appropriate to marketing's essential task. While reasons aplenty may be found, practitioners are left to fend for themselves when it comes to learning how best to communicate prospects' contexts-of-use to producers. When practitioners say that the literature is not well suited to their needs, as reported, for example, by Cunningham and Enis (1983), what marketing academics seem to hear is a general aversion to theory, conceptualizing, and abstraction. Such an interpretation of practitioners' remarks misses the point. Probably one of the toughest aspects of being a marketing practitioner is knowing that one is addressing a tiny region of a large landscape that is uncharted. Practitioners welcome models that are appropriate to the kinds of research we conduct and the decisions we take. We often find ourselves faced with the task of reducing a pool of items for use in questionnaires or a large set of candidate themes for concept testing. These are circumstances begging for appropriate conceptual models. However quantitative its methods may be, the essential contribution of science is qualitative. Science tells us how things group together, for example, that tides, falling apples, planets' paths, and phases of the moon are somehow connected. It tells us what goes with what—which kinds of things are essentially the same and which are different. Because so much of language is context free ("good quality," "good

nutrition’’), data reduction techniques may work to lose rather than detect the references to concrete aspects of people’s worlds that are present in ambiguous words. As in any domain in which humans try to understand the natural world, conceptualizations are just what is needed to help one ask the right questions and then see in the answers what is truly there before one’s eyes.

Notwithstanding the fact that marketing textbooks routinely present it, marketing’s “customer orientation” has not benefited from the conceptual elaboration that it warrants. Lacking familiarity with its day-to-day implementation in the world of marketing practice, and finding no treatments of customer orientation at the representational level, marketing academics appear to have written off the marketing concept as nothing more than rhetoric. They have failed to recognize that it has been the responsibility of marketing scientists to represent the marketing concept, i.e., to create conceptualizations appropriate to the task of those who guide producers in using the resources of the earth and beyond to satisfy human wants. In some quarters, misapprehension is so profound as to fail to grasp the nature of the task that society assigns to marketing. For example, Anderson (1983) offers no argument to the notion that marketing serves one segment of society, namely, those who seek a “technology for influencing the behavior of customers” (p. 27). We are all concerned, marketers and nonmarketers alike, that society’s resources be used efficiently and safely for human satisfaction. Acceptance by the scientific community at large, which Anderson seeks, will surely follow when marketing scientists bend their creativity to the discipline’s first responsibility, i.e., doing the basic science that society’s charge to marketing calls for.

Let us have no illusions about the likely outcome of the best possible performance of marketing’s task. If marketing practitioners could approach perfection in making “what the customer wants to buy,” the result would be an array of goods/services that would mirror human nature and circumstances in all its heterogeneity and its real and apparent foibles and follies. We may still find ourselves, even then, experiencing reactions ranging from amazement to dismay as we see what people “want to buy.” Let us be clear about what marketing is not. No one claims that the marketing concept is an altruistic doctrine. When entrepreneurs embrace it, they seek to further their own self-interest by tapping into the perceived self-interest of users. That is what it means to “make what the customer wants to buy.” As always, individual interests may run afoul of the interests of others and of society as a whole, and when that occurs we must hope that we have law, prudence, and ethics to exert a restraining influence on users and producers alike. Should we go further than this and ask marketing to be a societal function whose objective is to save people from themselves? Should we have marketers act *in loco parentis*, treating adult individuals as children? In this respect, the role of the marketing professional may be different from that of other professionals such as doctors, priests, lawyers, and teachers. Traditionally, as custodians of a body of expert knowledge, practitioners of the major professions have assumed a position of authority vis-à-vis their clients, in which

their primary duty is to recommend what they believe to be in the client's best interest. The feelings of the individual client assume a relatively minor role in the determination of the professional recommendation, although there probably has been some softening of such a sternly objective position in recent years.

As technology develops, we may look to the possibility of ever more refined and personally customized responses to customer wants. Individualization has already become an actuality in the phenomenon of the Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. Individualization will become customization when children, or their parents, specify the characteristics of the doll they order. It may eventually be possible for individual prospective users to submit information about their circumstances in order to receive from a producer a customized good/service that is guaranteed "best" for them. Two questions present themselves: (1) Is it conceivable that this "best" could ever be a "real good" in the sense of the philosopher's distinction between "real" and "apparent" goods (Exhibit 4.1)? (2) If the requisite knowledge existed, which it assuredly does not today, do we want a society in which people may acquire only what has been designated as "real" goods for them?

## **PERSPECTIVE ON MARKETING AND QUALITY-OF-LIFE**

It remains only to offer a few further comments on the second major topic of interest to students of ethics, namely, the subject of the highest good. To what extent does implementing marketing's societally assigned task hinder or help people in attaining the highest good? Precisely because the marketing function exists today, society's arrangements for want-satisfaction are more likely than in earlier times to promote humanity's attainment of the highest good. As regards its vast domain, marketing demands that we articulate the conditions of human lives—the internal and external contexts for the myriad activities of everyday living. Accordingly, it compels us to implement, for humanity as a whole, the ancient command: Know thyself. It can be argued that only by locating one's own circumstances and reactions in the context of behavioral description for all people in all circumstances is it possible truly to know one's nature.

Through the ages human beings have taken pleasure in, and nurtured, the reflexive human mind, which up to now has been manifest mainly through the work of particular minds among us. In the several domains of the humanities, artists and writers help us to understand ourselves. Now, the ubiquitous marketplace with all its maddening faults, large and small, is showing us ourselves, albeit, a partial view. The goods/services that are the responsibility of marketing practitioners are essential to the day-to-day quality of individual human lives, but the more significant contribution is likely to be that of marketing scientists. As they begin to develop models for practitioners to use in doing the job that society assigns, and to accumulate empirical data under the models' guidance, human beings will have taken their first systematic step toward describing human nature. Individually and collectively, we will begin to know ourselves as never

before. We will not like all that we come to learn about ourselves, but, as has occurred so often in the past, noticing problems is a first step toward making improvements. It is time for us to know ourselves from marketing's perspective.

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