

Remembrance

Jerome B. Kernan (1932–2007)

Born November 22, 1932, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Jerome Bernard Kernan left life abruptly on November 22, 2007, in Cincinnati. It was not the life-threatening liver ailment that Jerry had successfully kept at bay over the decades. Nor was it complications from the punctured lung and three broken ribs sustained in his enthusiasm during a friendly football game at the 1976 Association for Consumer Research (ACR) conference in Atlanta. Jerry's life—characterized by a love of scholarship, friends, family, his Catholic faith, and passion for golf—was claimed by an auto accident. Jerry was en route to join family gathered to celebrate Thanksgiving and his 75th birthday.

Jerry's path to becoming a founding father of the discipline of consumer research traced a scholar's journey. He graduated in 1949 from Cincinnati's Catholic, all male, Elder High School. The Korean War yielded a tour in the U.S. Air Force from 1951 to 1953. Jerry then studied business at the University of Cincinnati. He graduated in 1957 with a BBA and received the Cincinnati chapter of the American Marketing Association's first Outstanding Marketing Student Award. Subsequently, Jerry earned an MS degree from the University of Illinois–Urbana (awarded in 1959).

With a master's degree in hand and a doctorate in the oven, Jerry was appointed assistant professor of marketing at Oklahoma State University in the fall of 1959. There, he completed requirements for a PhD from the University of Illinois (awarded in 1962), and he achieved the rank of associate professor by 1964. The University of Texas–Austin appointed Jerry an associate professor of marketing (1964–67). Jerry returned to the University of Cincinnati in fall 1967 as an associate professor of marketing, and a year later was promoted to full professor; he became professor of behavioral analysis. By 1972, Jerry was appointed a Fellow of the Graduate School, a lifetime appointment. At Cincinnati he took on various duties, including department chair (1972–74) and MS/PhD program coordinator (1976–83).

Two decades later, in 1988, George Mason University's School of Management appointed Jerry a Commonwealth Eminent Scholar and GMU Foundation Professor of Behavioral Analysis. Jerry served as leader of the School of Management's Research and Recruiting Teams, and as coordinator for the AACSB Reaccreditation Team. The Board of Visitors granted Jerry status as Professor Emeritus of Behavioral Analysis in spring 2002. He returned to Cincinnati, regaining proximity to his children, Brian and Kathy, and his grandchildren. Here he maintained an active research agenda, built a home, and doted on his grandchildren.

The quantity and persistence of Jerry's scholarship across his nearly 50 year career is astonishing: six books, 73 journal articles published in 38 journals, dozens of proceedings papers, and numerous original papers in anthologies. His bibliography includes nine articles in the *Journal of Marketing Research* and four in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. His papers won the 1992 JCR Ferber Award (Kleine and Kernan 1991) and the 1993 American Association of Advertising / *Journal of Advertising* Best Article Award (Domzal and Kernan 1993). He had a brilliant open mind, publishing widely in the social sciences (e.g., *Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*).

Robert E. Kleine III is associate professor of marketing and George F. Patton Chair in Business Administration at the James F. Dicke College of Business Administration, Ohio Northern University, 525 S. Main Street, Ada, OH, 45810 (r-kleine@onu.edu). With appreciation to David Mick, Linda Golden, Mark Alpert, Bill Wilkie, Joel Cohen, Alan Sawyer, Susan Kleine, Laurie Meamber, and the many other friends of Jerry Kernan who assisted with this remembrance.

The diversity of topics on which Jerry published pioneering contributions includes advertising, artificial intelligence, choice, decision making, fashion, global advertising, interpersonal influence, leisure and subjective experience, materialism, meaning of products and advertising, personal selling, product perception, price symbolism, public relations, physical attractiveness stereotyping, postmodernism, search behavior, word of mouth, and research methods (survey response rates, sampling). Precociously interdisciplinary, Jerry's agile mind adroitly absorbed and creatively extended to the consumer research domain theories as diverse as attitude theory, attribution theory, compliance theories, role theory, myriad personality theories, information processing, risky shift, social cognition, symbolic interactionism, semiotics, and self-referencing theory. Jerry's research also expanded the discipline methodologically (e.g., graph theory, multivariate analysis, Q-methodology, social network analysis).

Jerry's scholarship evidences two phases. His years at the University of Texas were the most productive and intellectually revolutionary period of Jerry's career. His impact on the University of Texas research culture was enormous. A partnership with Montrose Sommers, on the University of Texas marketing faculty at the time, yielded a dozen journal articles and four books: *Perspectives in Marketing Theory* (1968c), *Comparative Marketing Systems: A Cultural Approach* (1968a), *Explorations in Consumer Behavior* (1968b), and *Promotion: An Introductory Analysis* (1970; with William Dommermuth). The behaviorally based *Promotion* text was widely used and broadly influential. Pulling the *Promotion* book from the shelf today, one encounters a still bold effort to pioneer a theory of promotion. Along with William Tucker, Kernan and Sommers wrote what were very early, if not the first, publications in consumer behavior. Jerry was sowing the seeds of what emerged as an important scholarly field of endeavor. Those early books and papers were used in consumer behavior seminars for years afterward.

At Cincinnati, Jerry shifted to cultivating the research programs of doctoral and master's students. A gifted and caring mentor, he served as chair for 15 dissertations and as a critical member and advisor for an additional 35 doctoral candidates and emerging scholars. Jerry's legacy is multiplied by the students whose careers he helped launch and the many others he mentored.

Unfailingly polite and proper, yet informal, Jerry was fun to be with, in his quietly eccentric way. Wearing creased high-water designer jeans and oxford shirt, he frequently padded down the office corridors in bare feet. Topsiders were worn sockless year-round. Jerry was passionate and compassionate. On learning of a setback, Jerry was quick to call. He would offer his condolences ("Those assholes don't know what they're doing!") and then transition to a pragmatic survey of next steps. Allowing no room for self-pity, Jerry was ever optimistic in his outlook. He consistently focused on how to be in a better place tomorrow.

As a founding father of the discipline of consumer research, Jerry was an articulate advocate for two key ideas (Kernan 1979). First, the consumer should be the centerpiece of the discipline's research. Second, as consumer researchers, our role is to serve the public purpose. Toward this end, consumer research's enabling institutions should "orchestrate the natural talents of academia, government and industry so as to enhance consumer welfare." We as consumer researchers, and our understanding of consumer behavior, are diminished to the degree that the discipline has strayed from his vision.

Jerry was instrumental in establishing the infrastructure of consumer research—ACR and JCR—and then nurtured the fledgling discipline to adolescence. On the occasion of ACR's silver anniversary, and JCR's first 20 years, Jerry produced histories that wonderfully document these two institutions (Kernan 1995b, 1995b). Although his role in the development of the field is modestly underplayed, one can get a feeling for his importance, his contributions, and his impact. I strongly recommend both these pieces for anyone new to the field or who did not know Jerry well. In them, Jerry exudes a spirit of optimism (we will make this happen) and inclusiveness (all researchers with good ideas are welcome). Many passages

from those histories, and his presidential address (Kernan 1979), strike me as projection. This passage resonates as pure Kernan:

We are concerned with people's interests and what they know, not with their pedigree. . . . This commerce of ideas—not restricted to an elite plutocracy—has kept the organization vibrant, insulating it from the malignancy of self-importance and irrelevance.

Jerry served ACR as a speaker, session chair, discussant, panelist, and program committee member or paper reviewer for every ACR conference up until 2001. He served as a member of the ACR board from 1974 to 1979, was program chair and conference co-chair in 1975, president in 1978, Fellow in Consumer Behavior award selection committee member (1979–80), and chair (1990–91), ACR/JCR Ferber Award judge in 1985, election committee member in 1988 and 1994, chair of the goals and mission task force in 1993, and ACR representative to the JCR Policy Board from 1987 to 2001.

For JCR, Jerry was a member of the Policy Board for five consecutive terms (1987–2001), vice president of the Policy Board (1988), president of the Policy Board (1989–91), a member of the Editorial Board (1982–2001), and chairman of the committee to select the next editor (1989). To many, he was the memory bank and, more importantly, the heart and the soul of the *Journal* for all those years. In recognition of his contributions, Jerry received the Editor's Award for Outstanding Service to the JCR Editorial Board (1983–88).

Kernan (1987) foreshadows the challenge of distilling his own legacy when he asked: "Have you ever tried to explain your work to a stranger? Succinctly?" Jerry was a leader at the vanguard to build the field of consumer research. His scholarship repeatedly pioneered new lines of inquiry. His vision shaped the two institutions foundational to the birth of consumer research as a discipline, ACR and JCR. Jerry's legacy is that he amplified the opportunities for all consumer researchers that follow.

Jerry was invariably modest about his accomplishments. Although he was writing about ACR, this quotation is equally autobiographical: "We have never been a group which pontificates; instead we just go about our business quietly but effectively" (Kernan 1995a). Indeed he did.

ROBERT E. KLEINE III

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