



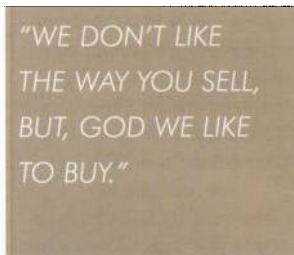
IS POLITICAL CORRECTNESS
HARMING THE RESEARCH PROCESS?
YVETTE MACKENZIE REPORTS FROM
THE 'RETHINK PINK' CONFERENCE

A FEAR OF THE FEMININE

There is an urgent need to review how marketers target women, and how female respondents are treated in the research studies. concluded last month's Rethink Pink conference on marketing to women. Under discussion was the tension between the oversensitivity of political correctness and the insensitivity of traditional gender-based segmentation. According to Michele Miller, a partner at Wizard of Ads in the US, political correctness is harming the research process as some researchers are still too timid to ask respondents if they are size 16 plus, or if they are comfortable revealing their sexual orientation or if they influence how large corporations spend their budgets. This timidity is not only unprofessional, it is inhibiting the research process. Categories used to define female respondents now tend to rely heavily on demographic data such as age and gender, rather than attitudes and aspirations. Jonathan Mildenhall, managing director of TBWA London was

damning about marketers resisting change and said that by "playing it safe we are treating women as special needs consumers".

Researchers need to re-evaluate traditional methods of classification and instead look at what women value. This means rather than using gender and age as definitive guides for



research, researchers should look at life-stage, lifestyle and how culture affects responses to marketing stimuli.

Fiona Jack, chairman of Green Light International argued that to achieve this, researchers must "forget gender-based segmentation, it is almost worse than useless".

People working in the marketing sector are "too influenced by popular culture" argued Jasmine Montgomery, client services and strategy

director at Futurebrand. She said that they can fail to notice what genuine consumers need. She explained that marketers need to stop researching stereotypes and look at "real women"; such as, professional, technology literate women who buy business products, and size 16 plus women. Both these groups represent significant percentages of the population and are high spenders but have historically been ignored by brand owners.

One of the biggest hurdles in developing innovative and exciting marketing campaigns is that although the campaigns are now often stale and clichéd, women continue to buy brands targeted specifically at them. Becky Barry, planning director at Leo Burnett summed it up: "We don't like the way you sell, but, God we like to buy." To challenge this damaging status quo the marketing community must find the right women to participate in research projects and ask the right questions. As Barry said, "we need to talk the right language", and of course not patronise female consumers if we want them to carry on spending.