

Abercrombie & Fitch

The Clothes and The Sex

Adult Oriented Life-Style Marketing Used To Sell Clothes

In 1999 a PBS Frontline documentary told the story of an outbreak of syphilis among teenagers from an affluent suburb of Atlanta Georgia. Over 50 teens were involved in a secret world of sex that functioned, as one boy put it, "like an underground railroad with everybody having sex with everybody," in which the only clueless people were the adults. The documentary reported parties of 12 and 13 year olds watching the Playboy Channel and simply copying the behaviors they saw.

What sexually charged medium might teens be watching and imitating today? Would you believe a clothing catalogue? Peruse any of Abercrombie & Fitch's 2001 quarterly catalogues and you'll discover there's a lot more for sale than just trendy clothes -- sex, values and lifestyles are being advertised as well. (See examples at right.)

All snug in an "adults only" shrink-wrapped package that screams "Gotta have it. This is cool." Welcome to lifestyle marketing. Over 250 pages of photos, tongue in cheek articles and only 100 pages of clothing ads, sell a point of view and a way of life. The lives that these appealing young men and women seem to be living are consumed with sex and partying. And they wear shirts with mock ad slogans like, "I Have A Big One: Abercrombie And Fitch Longboards". It is sexy, funny, subtle and rebellious all at the same time.

"WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO."

Apparently it sells more clothes too. According to parents, teachers and teens, Abercrombie and Fitch clothing is immensely popular in suburban junior and senior high schools throughout America. And the catalogue is too. Teens tear out the semi-nude pictures and plaster their lockers with them. They pass the catalogue around like contraband -- giggle at the jokes, stare at the models and perhaps secretly wish their lives were just as much fun.



Examples

- Numerous group pictures of half nude young men and women groping and stripping each other.
- A feature article promoting sex with the elderly, entitled "Dating the Elderly". Excerpt: "If you can get past a few wrinkles, you may find yourself in a hot romance with someone old enough to be your...". Although meant to be humorous, it's in extremely bad taste and exploits the elderly.
- Numerous pictures of rear male nudity.
- An interview with a male porn star which serves to legitimize porn and promiscuity.
- Numerous pictures of topless girls and nude boys (genitals obscured).
- Several articles and interviews advocating partying and sexual promiscuity.

If you are concerned about the values that A&F is promoting turn over this flyer to find out what you can do...

Take Action... Ditch Fitch!

Five Steps You Can Take



1. Open Discussion

First, ask your teens what their opinion is about A&F's catalogue. Are they aware of the values being advertised? Do they understand how A&F is promoting sex and partying in an effort to make their clothes "cool"? When it's your turn to explain why your family will not "buy into" A & F's lifestyle marketing. Try these lines:

- "The image that A & F is projecting does not fit with the values of our family."
- "If you wear their clothes you are helping A&F market their products and values."
- "If they're just clothes, why do so many young people cut out pictures from the catalogue and tape them inside their lockers? It's because those articles and ads are selling more than just clothes..."
- "We don't buy clothes from models who don't wear any. A&F will be welcome back in this house when they decide to just sell sportswear not pornography."

2. Institute a Buy-Back Policy

If your kids bought A&F with their own cash, institute a buy-back policy. Give them cash or a gift certificate for their A&F clothes and let them buy elsewhere.

3. Notify and Network

Inform all relatives and friends not to give A&F gift certificates for birthdays and holidays. Network with other parents, PTA's, youth groups, etc. to tune in to A&F's hidden agenda; drop out of A&F's lifestyle marketing plan; and turn on to clothes, products and entertainment that do not come attached with a lifestyle agenda that is contrary to yours.

4. Join the Nationwide Petition Drive

- Sign up online or print a petition form from www.americandecency.org/petitionform.htm
- Also, sign Illinois Lt. Governor Corrine Wood's online petition at www.stopaandf.com

5. Complain and Return

Write a complaint and return your A&F item to:
Abercrombie & Fitch
Michael Jeffries, President
4 Limited Parkway
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068-5302
614-577-6500
www.abercrombieandfitch.com

Don't Be Fooled

by official Abercrombie & Fitch corporate spin like, "we only market to college students" and "we only sell our catalogue to adults". Their target is young teens. Go to your local mall or high school to see how effectively they've reached this age group.

To reach this target group a rule of marketing is to depict, not young teens themselves, but the age group teens emulate. Thus, advertisements full of attractive 18 to 22 year olds are really targeting 13 to 17 year olds. It is also a marketing truism that teens are very brand loyal, so the time to reach them is at that stage when "fitting in" and "being cool" is of the utmost importance.

The irony that teens are encouraged to rebel against adults (thus the sexy and rebellious image of A&F) and yet follow each other slavishly over trivial matters like clothes (I can't go to school wearing that!) is not lost on the marketing gurus at A&F. They are exploiting this phenomena for all it's worth. Thus, your kids are sold attitudes and lifestyle choices that may ultimately harm them while A&F profits.

Of course these practices are also used by marketers for entertainment (MTV!) and other products (remember Camel dollars?). However, A&F's 2001 catalogues have crossed a line that others may follow -- unless we raise the discernment and consciences of our kids!

Pittsburgh Coalition Against Pornography
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