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The “Quick Fix” of Abercrombie and Fitch

In our modern, capitalist society, it is common for a company to release a series of bold, shocking, and even outlandish advertisements simply to sell a single product. As the years have gone on, advertisements have become even more daunting as competing brands are constantly trying to outdo one another. Boundaries are being pushed time and time again, so much so that the advertisements in today’s world are completely different than those of generations prior. But many companies are not phased by the extreme measures that must be taken to sell a product nowadays because all they care about is just that: selling a product. Abercrombie and Fitch, a popular clothing brand, is notoriously known for “pushing the envelope” in its advertising campaigns which primarily target their young adult consumers. Similar to countless other modern advertising strategies, Abercrombie and Fitch purposefully pushes boundaries by targeting and exploiting multiple known insecurities of young adults in an attempt to sell more of their seemingly “magical” clothing.

Abercrombie and Fitch has come under fire many times for over-sexualizing their advertisements. In order to sell everyday clothes, they will release a series of provocative images of perfectly-toned models posing scandalously with one another, who also just happen to be wearing the brand’s latest designs. One particular advertisement stands out among the rest for the way that it is blatantly overly sexualized. The advertisement is a black and white image of a young man and a young woman. Slight glimpses of the background reveal that the couple is out in the wilderness, but the main focus of the image is on their bodies. The young woman is lying on her back in the grass and the young man is hovering over her, propped up on his hands and elbows while she wraps her legs around his waist. Their faces are only a couple of inches apart.

The woman is dressed in a tight-fitting tank top and a pair of ripped jeans, while the man only wears a pair of jeans. The only words are written in the bottom left corner. In large white letters, it reads “YOUNG AND SEXY”, with the word sexy written in bright red. Beneath the phrase, in significantly smaller letters, is the brand’s name.

To any viewer, it is obvious that this advertisement screams, “SEX.” Though the couple’s facial expression cannot be seen, it is clear from the way they are embracing one another that they are in the midst of a passionate love affair. The sexual attraction between the two of them is impossible to ignore. By capturing the models in this particular position, Abercrombie and Fitch is making a blatant connection between their clothing and sexual relationships. If a young adult were to feel dissatisfied with their current relationship status, or lack thereof, one glimpse at this advertisement would suggest that Abercrombie and Fitch could be the solution to their problems. Perhaps these specific clothes might accentuate someone’s body in just the right way, and suddenly they will become undeniably desirable to someone else. According to the advertisement, these particular pieces of fabric may be the exact key that someone needs in order to become instantly more attractive.

Another aspect of this advertisement that is simply impossible to ignore is the incredible physique of both models. The woman is skinny and has a flat stomach, while the man has an incredibly defined chest and muscular arms. While we are unable to see their entire bodies, it is easy to assume that they are both in peak physical condition. Furthermore, the clothes that they are wearing are very flattering on both of their body types, as they perfectly highlight each model’s best features. This is no surprise, seeing as Abercrombie and Fitch would obviously want their clothes to be shown as the perfect way to flaunt one’s body. Abercrombie and Fitch

desires to give off the impression that their clothes will look the best on any consumer's body. Not only will they be flattering, but they will also provide the consumer with the self-confidence to venture into a romantic or sexual relationship, such as the one portrayed in the advertisement. This advertisement is constantly pushing the idea that these clothes are the ones that will make consumers truly comfortable in their own skin. It argues that this newfound confidence will radiate sexual appeal to the eyes of other equally attractive and confident individuals.

This particular advertisement appears to make so many lofty claims about the benefits of wearing this clothing line that it almost sounds like magic. This advertisement and many others like it would have the consumer believe that purchasing and wearing these clothes will completely transform their life. In these clothes, they should look attractive. And not only will they be overjoyed with the way the clothes flatter their body, but they will also be seen as very sexy and very desirable in the eyes of others. Furthermore, they will be so confident in their new look that they will be more than comfortable with commencing a new sexual relationship. And not only will it be a sexual relationship, it will be the type of experience that young teens fantasize about. It will be erotic, it will be passionate, it will be thrilling, it will be dangerous, it will be sexy. They will not be caught in some boring, lack-luster romance; they will be engulfed in an enticing affair. It will be one of the most exciting and buoyant experiences they have ever had. They could have it all: a great body, loads of self-confidence, and an incredibly attractive and eager sexual partner. All they have to do is spend their money at Abercrombie and Fitch. It is that easy.

It does not take a genius to understand how flawed this logic is. There are clearly more issues than one can count with this way of thinking, but the most blatant is the fact that no piece

of clothing could ever transform someone's life in such a drastic manner. It is simply impossible. The subjects at hand—body image, self-confidence, and sexual appeal—are massive issues that an endless amount of teens and young adults struggle with on a daily basis. These are deeply-rooted insecurities that have been continually made worse due to years and years of exposure to the impossible beauty standards set by our society. Oftentimes, these insecurities are so extreme that they dominate the minds of teenagers and can even last well into adulthood. For Abercrombie and Fitch to suggest, even in an inadvertent manner, that wearing their clothing could resolve these vulnerabilities is downright absurd. No single piece of clothing, no matter how flattering it may be, will ever have the power to erase the years of shame and embarrassment that come along with body-confidence issues. Additionally, chances are that the clothes that look amazing on models will not look as impressive on the body of an average teenager. When a young consumer purchases the clothes and is forced to face this reality, their self-confidence will plummet even further. If these seemingly magical clothes, clothes that are supposed to make one as attractive as a model, do not have the same effect on them, then perhaps nothing will ever make them feel beautiful. Maybe they are just beyond the point of hope.

The more that this advertisement, and countless others quite similar to it, are pulled apart, the more apparent its harmful messages become. Abercrombie and Fitch is purposefully targeting a sensitive subject in young adults and exploiting it in order to turn a profit. They are telling teenagers that these models, the ones who are in perfect, almost unattainable, shape, are the standard for what everyone should strive to look like. As a result, teenagers are forced to ingest these very unhealthy ideas of self-image and inadvertently begin to apply them to their own lives. The more photos that they see glamorizing these specific body types, the more they

will come to loathe every feature of themselves that differs from the so-called cultural “norm.” Teenagers already have a difficult time being comfortable in their constantly changing bodies, but once unachievable standards of beauty are thrown into the mix, it becomes almost impossible for them to ever feel satisfied with the reflection they see in the mirror. No matter how hard they may work to love themselves as they are, they will constantly be fighting a losing battle.

Advertisements such as this one will never relent in their attempts to tear down the self-esteem of their consumers. Companies know that if they continue to push this unattainable standard of beauty, consumers will forever be doing anything they can to feel better about themselves.

This type of behavior on behalf of a marketing campaign is not necessarily surprising in itself. But what is troubling is the fact that Abercrombie and Fitch, and others, are purposefully targeting the young and vulnerable members of society in their advertisements. They single out teenagers, a group that is barely beyond childhood, and intentionally work to tear down their already fragile senses of self-confidence. If they can make their customers feel inadequate enough, then their extreme advertising style will actually pay off. Young adults will buy into the fantasy that particular pieces of clothing or a brand name will be the quick fix to their struggles with body image. And when these purchases do not provide the effortless solutions that young adults were promised, their senses of self-worth will only be further demolished. How can any brand specifically target a group of consumers in such a destructive manner? How can Abercrombie and Fitch willingly instill such a great sense of self-loathing into the mindsets of an already mentally unstable group of people? They could project healthy messages out into the media with marketing campaigns centered around self-love and the celebration of all body shapes and sizes. They could be an inclusive brand that encourages American youths to find a

home in their own skin. But instead, they abide by the mantra that “sex sells.” Abercrombie and Fitch continues to advertise with their apparently “perfect” models, and, in doing so, continues to encourage teenagers to despise their natural appearance. If they can make the youth of America feel awful about their natural size, they know that their sales will never plummet. After all, who would ever turn down a quick and easy way to reach their dream body?

Works Cited

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