



## Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

c/o Judge Baker Children's Center  
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March 11, 2008

Steve Allen MD, Chief Executive Officer  
Rick Miller, President and Chief Operating Officer  
J. Terrance Davis MD, Interim Chief Medical Officer  
Michael Brady MD, Physician-In-Chief and Chairman of the Dept. of Pediatrics  
Abigail S. Wexner, Chairman, Board of Directors  
Nationwide Children's Hospital  
700 Children's Drive  
Columbus, OH 43205

Dear Dr. Allen, Mr. Miller, Dr. Davis, Dr. Brady and Ms. Wexner,

We are writing to urge Nationwide Children's Hospital not to sell naming rights to the Emergency Department and Trauma Center to Abercrombie & Fitch. Given growing concerns about the sexualization of young girls, it is troubling that a children's hospital would name its emergency room after a company that routinely relies on highly sexualized marketing to target teens and preteens. The Abercrombie & Fitch Emergency Department and Trauma Center marries the Abercrombie brand to your reputation; a company with a long history of undermining children's wellbeing is now linked with healing.

Abercrombie & Fitch is one of the most popular brands with preteens,<sup>1</sup> yet the clothing company routinely includes nudity and explicit sexual situations in its advertising. In 2003, the company was the target of boycotts and protests when its catalog featured young people engaging in group sex.<sup>2</sup> In February of this year, in response to complaints, police carted away two large promotional photographs from an Abercrombie & Fitch store in Virginia and cited the manager on obscenity charges.<sup>3</sup> One current Abercrombie website promoting its Gilly Hicks line features graphic nudity, boasting "(o)ur site shows a lot of skin."<sup>4</sup> While visitors to the site are told that they must be eighteen to enter and "see what we're wearing under our clothes," Abercrombie does not verify that they are actually of age. In other words, the preteens with whom Abercrombie & Fitch is so popular can easily enter the site.

The role that fashion, media, and marketing industries play in the sexualization of young girls is well documented, most notably in a 2007 report by the American Psychological Association.<sup>5</sup> Research links sexualization with some of the most pressing and common mental health problems of girls including eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.<sup>6</sup> Research also demonstrates a link between sexualization

and the objectification of women in the media and body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety.<sup>7</sup> Appearance anxiety is in turn linked to the earlier onset of cigarette smoking among adolescents.<sup>8</sup> Adolescent girls with an objectified view of their own bodies are also more likely to have poor sexual health.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the sexualization and objectification of girls and women can have negative effects on boys and men, including making it more difficult to have satisfying relationships.<sup>10</sup>

It is equally distressing that a children's hospital would promote a company that features impossibly thin and idealized body types in its advertising when 10 million girls and young women in the United States are struggling with an eating disorder.<sup>11</sup> Frequent exposure to such advertising is linked to higher rates of eating disorders.<sup>12</sup> Mike Jeffries, Abercrombie's CEO has publicly stated that his company's clothes are not for kids that are overweight, unattractive or unpopular.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, high school students launched a "'girl-cott'" of the store for selling T-shirts that demeaned and objectified girls by featuring slogans such as "Do I Make You Look Fat?" and "Who needs brains when you have these?"<sup>14</sup>

Abercrombie has described its clothing as "age-appropriate with an edge"<sup>15</sup> but that edge often means objectifying or demeaning young people. In 2002, the store sold thongs for 10-year-olds with "eye candy" and "wink wink" printed on the front.<sup>16</sup> As stated in the APA report, "Given that girls may be developing their identity in part through the clothing they choose, it is of concern when girls at increasingly younger ages are invited to try on and wear teen clothes designed to highlight female sexuality. Wearing such clothing may make it more difficult for girls to see their own worth and value in any way other than sexually."<sup>17</sup> The company was also the target of protests for selling shirts that demeaned Chinese-Americans through the use of racist caricatures.<sup>18</sup>

Given how much criticism has been aimed at Abercrombie & Fitch, it is not surprising that the company would want to associate itself with the good name of Nationwide Children's Hospital.<sup>19</sup> It is distressing, however, that you are willing to promote a company whose tactics and products are so antithetical to the hospital's mission "to enhance the health of children everywhere."<sup>20</sup>

We understand that it is common for public health institutions to seek gifts from the business community. But when these gifts include a quid pro quo like naming rights, they cross the line from philanthropy to advertising. And, given this company's appalling history of targeting children with sexualized marketing and clothing, no public health institution should be advertising Abercrombie & Fitch. We urge you – for the sake of your hospital's reputation and the health and wellbeing of children – to rescind your offer to name your emergency room after Abercrombie & Fitch.

Sincerely,\*

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Peggy O'Mara, Publisher/Editor, Mothering Magazine

Lori Peiffer, The Emily Program, St. Paul, MN

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Constance Rhodes, Founder and President, FINDING balance, Inc.; Author, *Life Inside the Thin Cage*

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\*Affiliations for individual signatories are listed for identification only.

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## Organizational Endorsers

Action Coalition for Media Education

Andrea's Voice Foundation

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

Center for a New American Dream

Commercial Alert

Concerned Educators Allied for a Safe Environment

Dads and Daughters

Eating Disorders & Education Network

Hardy Girls Healthy Women

Kids Can Make a Difference

National Eating Disorders Association

National Institute on Media and the Family

Obligation, Inc.

Our Bodies Ourselves

Parents for Ethical Marketing

The Praxis Project

The SHELBY Project

Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment

Women and Girls Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> Schor, J. (2004). *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, New York: Scribner, p. 26

<sup>2</sup> Gumbel, A. (December 4, 2003). Clothing company withdraws catalogue backing group sex. *The Independent*. Accessed on March 5, 2008 from: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4158/is\\_20031204/ai\\_n12728932](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20031204/ai_n12728932).

<sup>3</sup> Stone, S. (February 3, 2008). Virginia Beach police seize photos from Abercrombie store. *The Virginian-Pilot*. Accessed on March 5, 2008 from: <http://hamptonroads.com/2008/02/virginia-beach-police-seize-photos-abercrombie-store>.

<sup>4</sup> Accessed on March 5, 2008 from: <http://www.gillyhicks.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved from [www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

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- <sup>11</sup> National Eating Disorders Association. Statistics: Eating disorders and their precursors Accessed on March 5, 2008 from [http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage\\_ID=320&Profile\\_ID=41138](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=320&Profile_ID=41138).
- <sup>12</sup> Field, AE, et al. (1999). Exposure to the mass media and weight concerns among girls. *Pediatrics*. 103:E36.; Hargreaves, D. & Tiggemann, M. (2002). The effect of television commercials on mood and body dissatisfaction: The role of appearance-schema activation. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 21, pp.465-477.
- <sup>13</sup> Denizet-Lewis, B. (2006). The man behind Abercrombie & Fitch. *Salon*. Accessed on March 5, 2008 from <http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2006/01/24/jeffries/>.
- <sup>14</sup> Aschoff, S. (November 5, 2005). It's grrrl power vs. Abercrombie & Fitch. *The St. Petersburg Times*. Accessed on March 5, 2008 from: [http://www.sptimes.com/2005/11/05/Floridian/It\\_s\\_grrrl\\_power\\_vs\\_A.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2005/11/05/Floridian/It_s_grrrl_power_vs_A.shtml).
- <sup>15</sup> Critchell, S. (April 9, 2001). 4-9: Tweens hear Fashion's Beat. *Associated Press*. Accessed March 5, 2008 from [http://www.lubbockonline.com/stories/041501/lif\\_041501058.shtml](http://www.lubbockonline.com/stories/041501/lif_041501058.shtml).
- <sup>16</sup> Ortiz, V. (May 17, 2002). Parents say kid's thong is just plain wrong. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Accessed on March 5, 2008 from <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=43941>.
- <sup>17</sup> APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007), p. 14.
- <sup>18</sup> Ortiz, V (2002).
- <sup>19</sup> In a press release announcing the partnership, Children's Hospital Foundation president Jon Fitzgerald praised Abercrombie "for their tangible commitment to the welfare of children." Accessed March 5, 2008 from <http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/gd/applications/controller.cfm?page=204&id=261&type=new>.
- <sup>20</sup> Accessed March 5, 2008 from <http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/gd/templates/pages/AboutUs/AboutUs.aspx?page=21>.