

ABC's *Nightline*

08/05/25

12:37:29 a.m. [TEASE]

25 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Sydney Sweeney]

BYRON PITTS: The American Eagle ad that no one can stop talking about —

SYDNEY SWEENEY [in American Eagle ad]: My jeans are blue.

PITTS: — starring Sydney Sweeney, the romcom sweetheart from films like *Anyone But You* —

SWEENEY [in *Anyone But You*]: I will see you on the other side.

PITTS: — caught up in a firestorm. Everyone from the President —

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: I think her ad is fantastic.

PITTS: — to singer Lizzo weighing in on Instagram. Is there any such thing as bad publicity?

(...)

12:40:24 a.m.

7 minutes and 41 seconds

PITTS: Tonight, not since Brooke Shields's Calvin Klein ad has the jeans company ignited such a firestorm as American Eagle's campaign starring actress Sydney Sweeney. Is it about jeans or more than that? Here's *Nightline*'s Ashan Singh.

ASHAN SINGH: The ad campaign that it seems like no one can stop talking about, garnering massive attention. Actor Sydney Sweeney, clad in all denim for American Eagle, looking to the camera and delivering these words.

SWEENEY [in American Eagle ad]: Genes are passed down from parents to offspring often determining traits like hair color, personality and even eye color.

SINGH: The steamy campaign causing quite the debate.

SWEENEY [in American Eagle ad]: My jeans are blue.

SINGH [TO MALE NYC PASSERBY #1]: When you first saw that ad, what was your reaction?

MALE NYC PASSERBY #1: I won't lie to you. At first, I kind of skipped it over. I didn't pay too much mind to it until later on TikTok. I see people paying more attention.

TIKTOK USER “AJWASHUNTED”: It’s giving eugenics. It’s giving white supremacy. I’m uncomfortable watching that, and I’m white.

SINGH: For those who find it offensive, saying it’s promoting eugenics and its discredited idea of white genetic superiority —

FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1: Scripting in the individual that they chose was definitely not the right route.

SINGH [TO FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1]: Are you wearing American Eagle shorts right now?

FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1: But I am American eagle shorts right now.

SINGH [TO FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1]: How has it changed your opinion on the company and how you will —

FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1: Slightly.

SINGH [TO FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1]: — like, will you continue to shop there?

FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #1: Slightly. I mean, I’m not going in the store today, I can tell you that right now.

SINGH: — to others who find it harmless and say it’s just about the denim.

TIKTOK USER “MANIC4LYFE”: Haters, that’s what you all are. Sydney Sweeney looks damn good. Keep on hating. Congratulations, Sydney.

FEMALE NYC PASSERBY #2: Honestly, like, she can do her thing. I’m a girl’s girl, so I support it.

SINGH: This week, even President Trump joining the conversation.

TRUMP: If Sydney Sweeney is a registered Republican, I think her ad is fantastic.

SINGH: All of it sparking a full out debate.

ANDSCAPE’S KELLEY L. CARTER: Everyone is talking about the American Eagle advertisement because essentially they feel like the advertiser is making a play with homophones with jeans and genes. Some of the viewers are saying, you know, this is just an ad, we’re — we’re looking too much into this and then others are saying, no, this is absolutely problematic and something that we should address.

PR PROFESSIONAL ROSEMARY WILSON: Anytime you get a response to anything that’s

this strong, it obviously is a sign that you've really struck a chord. The culture wars are far from over, right?

SINGH: Over the weekend, the actress at the center of it all stepping out at the premiere of her new film *Americanah*, but staying mum on the controversy.

CARTER: Sydney Sweeney is one of the hottest young Hollywood stars right now. She not only is in shows that your children are probably watching like *Euphoria*.

[*EUPHORIA* SCENE]

CARTER: She also was in the first season of the well lauded anthology, *The White Lotus*.

[*WHITE LOTUS* SCENE]

CARTER: She is someone who is very much collecting credits and some of the most inventive pieces of art right now in Hollywood.

SINGH: The 27-year-old, also making waves in her first starring role in a large feature film, *Anyone But You*, alongside Glen Powell.

[*ANYONE BUT YOU* SCENE]

SINGH: Sweeney's latest domination of the news cycle started nearly two weeks ago, when retailer American Eagle dropped its new campaign with several different videos and billboards.

CARTER: In the ads, we're seeing the camera kind of slowly make its way up over the course of her body and her talking in a very soft deli.very, very sexy, and in a lot of ways, sensual way, saying, you know, I'm not going to tell you to buy the jeans that I'm wearing, but I am going to tell you that I have great genes.

SWEENEY [in American Eagle ad]: And I definitely won't say that they're the most comfortable jeans I've ever worn.

SINGH: As more people saw the ads, the headlines began and so did the backlash.

TIKTOK USER "WILD\_MILK": This weird gene/jeans ad for American Eagle is at best ignorant and at worst, like, literally promoting eugenics.

TIKTOK USER "ALLYLANGAN": All I think they wanted was to get people to start talking about American Eagle again.

MEGYN KELLY [on *The Megyn Kelly Show*, 07/30/25]: Welcome to *The Megyn Kelly Show*.

SINGH: Others defending American Eagle like TV personality Megyn Kelly —

KELLY [on *The Megyn Kelly Show*, 07/30/25]: We're sick and [expletive] tired of the nonsense where you are not allowed to ever celebrate someone who is white and blond and blue eyed.

SINGH: — and Bill Maher on *Real Time*.

BILL MAHER [on HBO's *Real Time*, 08/01/25]: I also think it's pretty funny that all the online social justice girls are like, it's racist. There's no such thing as good genes, right? And then you go on Tinder and swipe left on every bald guy.

WILSON: This serves as a good reminder that the American public is still highly divided and polarized and I think that, you know, anything or any business or company that, you know, wades into that crossfire, can expect to have a similar reaction.

SINGH: Some celebrities entering the conversation too. Lizzo posting this video to her page today with her version of the jean ad.

CARTER: Even doja cat has done a play on this advertisement, kind of making fun of Sydney Sweeney's like, sexy whisper style of delivery in this ad.

DOJA CAT: Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality, and maybe even eye color. My jeans are blue.

SINGH: American Eagle responding late last week, writing in part on Instagram, "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" is and always was about the jeans," going onto say, "we'll continue to celebrate how everyone wears their AE jeans with confidence, their way. Great jeans look good on everyone."

WILSON: The company obviously decided to stand by their ad, but that has clearly not quelled the controversy or persuaded the critics, because I don't believe that people believe that their word choices weren't intentional.

SINGH: Sweeney has not responded to ABC News request for comment. This isn't the first time there's been a debate over an ad campaign for designer denim. In 1980, Calvin Klein sparked a conversation when then-15-year-old model Brooke Shields posed and said this tagline:

BROOKE SHIELDS [in 1980]: You want to know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing.

SINGH: And then there was Anna Nicole Smith's 1990s campaign for Guess Jeans. Sweeney nodding to Anna Nicole Smith in her own guess campaign in 2021. The actress has turned heads with several of her brand deals, selling her bathwater and her Dr. Squatch soap —

SWEENEY [in Dr. Squatch soap ad]: Hello, you dirty little boys. Are you interested in my body...wash?

SINGH: — rolling out special menu items with Baskin-Robbins.

BASKIN ROBBINS WORKER [in ad]: Hey, Sydney, your signature scoop is ready.

SWEENEY [in Baskin Robbins ad]: Thank you. What?

CARTER: Sydney Sweeney is pretty much ubiquitous right now. And aside from the brand deals, she's just everywhere. She was recently at Jeff Bezos's wedding. She truly is someone who has made a mark on pop culture.

PAPARAZZI: Sydney, those eyes please.

SINGH: The big question now, what does this mean for Sydney Sweeney standing in Hollywood?

WILSON: It's hard to know how everything will play out in the end for both, you know, the company and Sydney Sweeney, you know, personally and you know, by way of, you know, the brand that's built up around her.

CARTER: I think this is a prime example of there being no such thing as bad publicity. Not only has American Eagle stock gone up, but people are actually searching for these ads to see what people are talking about in the first place.

PITTS: Our thanks to Ashan.