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An Open Call for the Close-Minded: Remedying the Impossible Body Image Standard for Women in the Entertainment Industry with an Emphasis on Weightism

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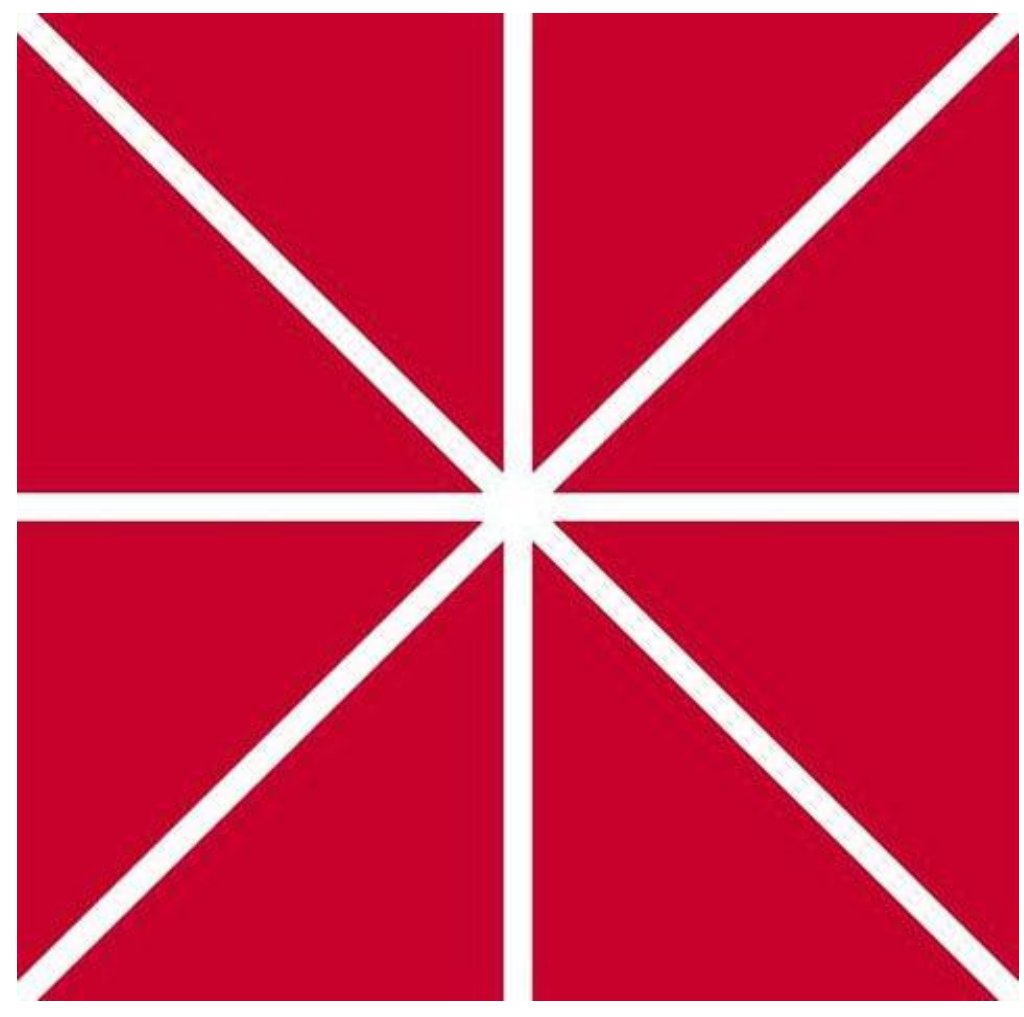Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts

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Remedying the Impossible Body Image Standard for Women in the Entertainment Industry with an Emphasis on Weightism

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So What's This All About?

The entertainment industry's criterion for women is obscenely selective, and harmful in physical, psychological, and even spiritual ways to the actors themselves as well as the rest of the female populace. So how do we fix it? By examining the careers of non-standard but successful performers, the productions that attempt to defy the industry's typical depiction of women, and the scholarly philosophies on the reception of these various influences by the public, I have determined steps we—as a society—can take in order to disband the impossible physical requirements imposed on women of the industry. I will culminate my research into a one-act play with the goal of accurately representing the struggles of a variety of body types and their psychological effect on female performers.
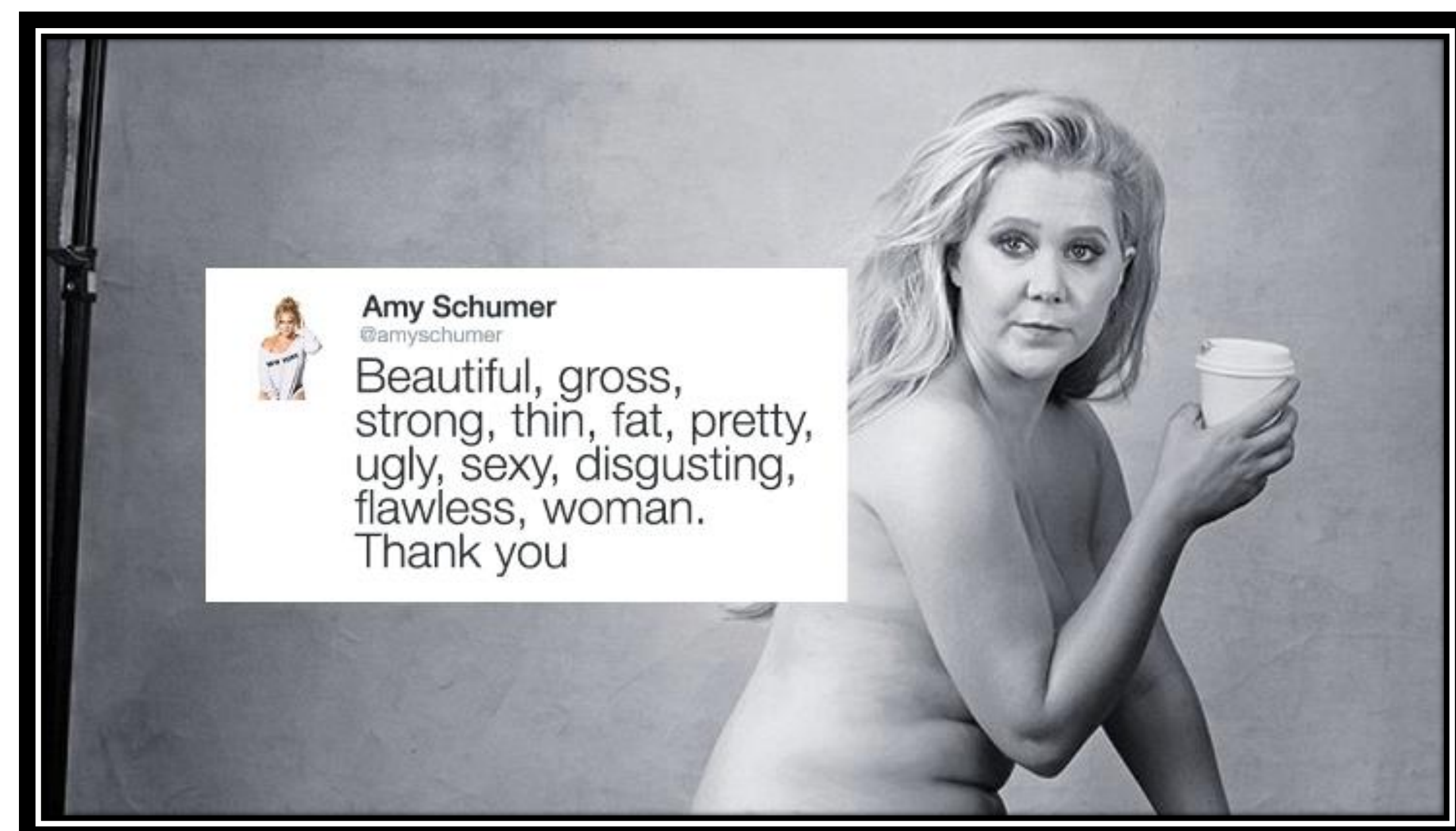
What Exactly Did I Do?

To conduct my research, I delved into books and articles dedicated to explaining the relationship between women and the physical form, studying the theories behind what our weight-obsessive culture does to the female psyche and looking into case studies done with different therapy groups on their perception of the entertainment industry. I also scrutinized films that emphasize female appearance: *Spy*, *Hairspray*, and *The Devil Wears Prada*. By analyzing the messages each of these films send out about human exterior versus interior, I was able to show how the industry makes efforts to change the way women are portrayed onscreen and but often falls short of a comprehensive understanding of what actually needs to be changed. Interviews and writings with/by socially-conscious actors contributed an insider perspective on casting and the ways plus-size actors can overcome the superficiality of the industry, thereby encouraging the reinvention of social expectations for women's bodies and helping them accept themselves for who they are.

How Does This Affect You?

There are many who believe the entertainment industry to be an entirely superficial and pointless facet of the United States economy, and therefore the topic of this study to be an irrelevant discussion altogether. However, whether or not you believe the industry to possess any real value, it cannot be denied that it possesses real influence. It shapes sociocultural practices far more than most of us recognize. It represents and portrays our deepest fantasies, subconsciously implanting within us desires we didn't even know we had. We use movies to inspire people and call attention to the issues our society needs to address, we use them to forge connections within the community, and we use them to express our individual humanity. With so many wonderful elements wrapped up in a big, fantastical package, we lose sight of the subtle hypnosis that occurs within all of us as we take in new media every day. This constant absorption of images implants the idea in our mind that the body types you see in most productions—"hipless, belly-less, and above all 'thin'" (Fox-Kales 5)—are the norm. Suddenly, there is an astronomical pressure to match this standard, which in reality is biologically impossible for 95% of female population (Fox-Kales 5). The pressure manifests in unhealthy lifestyle choices, with women all over the country developing severe cases of mental and eating disorders, such as yo-yo dieting, anorexia, and bulimia. By remedying the weight-obsessive culture that permeates the collective female psyche of the entertainment industry, we can then begin to remedy the damage that has been done to the self-esteem of women all over the country, ridding them of the harmful expectations to which they hold themselves.

What's Next?

The time has come for women to stand up and say, "I'm naturally beautiful, and I deserve to be seen as I naturally am just as much as anyone else." It must become the battle cry of the public, and women must cease to require the impossible beauty standard of each other so that we can stand in unity. It's an exhausting burden to continue, and the sooner people realize it is an unnecessary one, the sooner society can move past it and embrace women for their uniqueness. We must work to tell and write the stories of real women, to fight for accurate representation in performance so that this form of discrimination can be overcome. It is what makes stories theatrically compelling; reality and truth is what connects the human race to art, what inspires its creation. If we compromise art for the sake of the traditionally-patriarchal aesthetic, we lose that authenticity, and so the art becomes vapid, generic, and lifeless. In all my time learning about the craft of storytelling, the most important thing I've learned is that we need to be truthful, and we need to do whatever it takes to get our industry to see—and *show*—the truth.

Who Do I Have To Thank?

Fox-Kales, Emily. *Body Shots: Hollywood and the Culture of Eating Disorders.* Excelsior Editions, 2011. Print.

And all the women out there who work hard to love themselves for who they are, regardless of what anyone else thinks or says to them.