

Before



After



EMBRACE



OUT 4 AUGUST
RATED MA15+ / 90 MINS.

DIRECTOR Taryn Brumfitt

CAST Turia Pitt, Ricki Lake, Stefano Ferrario, Amanda de Cadenet, Mia Freedman

PLOT After posting an unconventional photo of herself online that went viral, Adelaide mum Taryn Brumfitt drew the attention of the world media and received thousands of messages from women regarding negative body image. This documentary follows Taryn around the globe as she interviews women from all walks of life, tackling the controversial issue head on.

IN AN AGE WHERE any cretin with a camera phone and the ability to do something stupid has the ability to receive some modicum of viral internet fame, it's nice to see a person try and do something worthwhile once the digital spotlight has shone on them. Said spotlight well and truly hit Australian mother of three Taryn Brumfitt who, in 2013, posted a before/after pic of herself on Facebook — the 'before' being a toned Brumfitt after a bodybuilding competition; the 'after' a smiling, naked, slightly more Rubenesque portrait. Over 100 million views and countless worldwide media appearances later, Brumfitt has restyled herself as a 'positive body image activist', this Kickstarter-assisted documentary her attempt to delve much deeper into the topic.

Using her own journey from dealing with post-baby body depression to self-acceptance as a kicking off point, Brumfitt heads to all corners of the globe to speak with experts and a diverse cross-section of women from all walks of life to examine their experience with body image issues. From the famous (talk show hosts Ricki Lake and Amanda de Cadenet) to 'bearded dame' Harnaam Kaur and burns survivor Turia Pitt, the talking heads are engaging and illuminating,

each woman's story bringing a deeper understanding of how widespread and insidious the problem has become thanks to mass media playing up to women's insecurities (for a clear example of how ludicrous the concept of a 'perfect body' is, check Brumfitt's eyebrow-raising visit to an oblivious LA plastic surgeon).

It's to the credit of Brumfitt, the writer and director of this debut documentary, that she has taken a subject that sounds potentially uncomfortable and off-putting and turns it into a compelling, inspiring viewing experience that is in no short supply of joy and triumph among its many heartbreaking moments. The fact such heavy subject matter can be repurposed into something truly uplifting speaks to not only Brumfitt's skills behind the camera, but also her effervescent, positive spirit when in front of it.

JAMES JENNINGS

VERDICT A must-see doco that thoroughly engages as well as educates on an important subject, *Embrace* is a timely call to arms that aims to inspire rather than wallow.

Writer-director-star Taryn Brumfitt.
Above: The infamous viral photo.



BONUS FEATURE

SELF-EMBRACE

Director Taryn Brumfitt on the challenges of her debut doco

Embrace seems like the kind of film younger people really should go and see...

The overwhelming response we had from test screenings was "oh my gosh, my daughter has to see this" or "my son needs to see this", because they live in this landscape of social media and photoshopped imagery and nothing is what it seems, and this film is the reality of life and I think that it highlights what's important and what's not.

The film does a good job of showing how widespread the issue has become.

It really surprised me. When I put the photo up and it went viral and about 7000 messages hit my inbox, it was really full on. And I remember thinking "Gosh, here am I experiencing my problem, but half the world is experiencing the exact same thing." When we visited all the different countries – the Dominican Republic, Canada, France, wherever – the problem was the same wherever we went. During the vox pops, nobody really had anything nice to say about themselves. I guess the globalisation of the media and the currency in which we view another human being has really impacted people's lives and the happiness they experience in life. So many people are anchored down by how they feel about their body, and you can't live a fulfilled and happy life if you've got that negative ping-pong conversation happening in your head.

Was it hard to narrow Embrace's focus?

It was a challenge. We edited for 23 weeks. We were always shifting things around – everyone in the film had to earn their place. I could've made three documentaries with all the people I met and all the stories they told. In the end the goal was to have each character have something different from the next. It was important to me that anyone could watch the documentary and relate to somebody, somebody to connect with.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned?

The really exciting thing is that we all have access to making a change. So many people are looking for the pill, the potion, the lotion, the diet – they're looking for all these answers to fulfil themselves, but really it's in their brains, they've got everything they need. They just need to flick the switch inside their heads and think "it's okay to live with a bit of a jiggy bum and wobbly thighs, it's actually okay and it's not the meaning of my life to obsess about those things". JJ