



# Measuring Up: How Advertising Affects Self-Image

*Vickie Rutledge Shields*

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The mute gestures of advertising images are frozen for posterity by photographers and illustrators, gestures that, for better or worse, perpetuate a certain aesthetic and eventually become emblematic of a period. The images of today display the values of a society that has more interest in the body than the mind. They are technoenhanced labyrinths of unattainable appearances that leave women and men feeling horrified, estranged, and restricted by unrealistic, silent mandates. *Measuring Up* looks at advertising as more than just a way to extract money from unsuspecting people but as a vehicle for conveying the larger views of a confining, body-obsessed culture.

By weaving theoretical and textual insights from feminist and cultural studies with the voices of real women and men, *Measuring Up* offers a unique reception analysis of the effects of repetitious exposure to advertisements of perfect bodies in our everyday lives. Shields examines a particular, complex relationship between the idealized images of gender we see in advertising and our own thoughts, feelings, and behavior in relation to these images. The study is unique in presenting audience reception in terms of ethnographic data, not textual interpretations alone.

*Measuring Up* engages with and informs current theoretical debates within these sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory literatures: feminist media studies, feminist film theory, critical social theory, cultural studies, and critical ethnography. This is an important work that explores the forms and channels of power used in one of the most insidious and overt means of mass influence in popular culture.

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