

Why Don't You Look Like a Fitness Model?

Part 1: It's Okay to Be Your Fabulous Self

a "Guest Pose" article by [Krista Scott-Dixon, PhD](#)



This is my real body, I swear.

And I am a natural blonde

Some time ago a reader emailed me to ask why I did not look like a fitness model. She proceeded to suggest that perhaps my advice was not good if I did not provide evidence that said advice had worked. I assume that the evidence in question was a shot of me posing awkwardly in high heels and a bikini. She didn't seem overly interested in evidence which consisted of me lifting large heavy things while dressed in oversize sweatpants and army boots. Amazingly, my video entitled "Sweaty Krista Covered In Chalk and Plate Dirt" just isn't selling too well. Perhaps I should try the fetish market.

Anyhoo, this question raised some issues for me that I'd like to discuss.

1. The assumption that fit women all look like fitness models. There are all shapes and sizes of fit women and female athletes in the world, from 90 lb. gymnasts, to 150 lb. sprinters, to 200 lb. shotputters, and everything in between. There are female athletes who are mentally or physically disabled but could kick my ass from here till next Tuesday.

2. The assumption that fit women all want to look like fitness models. Some do, some don't. Most female athletes are more concerned with performance and achievement than aesthetics. There is nothing wrong with trying to look like a fitness model, if it's a goal that you have set for yourself, and a goal you can achieve safely and sanely. But it's not the only way to be visibly or actually fit. The goal of a fitness model in competition is perfection: good skin tone, nice physical display (which includes costume, hair, makeup, and a smile), pleasing physique, looking good in exercise wear, a swimsuit, and often evening wear. While a fitness model is certainly an athlete, she is not supposed to show the exertion of her performance. The goal of an athlete is achievement, and that often means getting dirty, getting bruised or cut, competing wearing things like tape, bandages, knee braces, and so forth. The athlete's attire is often unflattering or baggy, because it's usually designed to maximize the athlete's capability of movement, not her aesthetic presentation (Brazilian volleyball player uniforms, arm butt floss, notwithstanding). Athletes can guzzle water or pour it over their head to cool off, spit, throw up at the finish line, jump into the dirt, and do a variety of unattractive things in the course of their endeavours. So, while I do not mean to suggest that fitness models are not athletes (because their training usually necessitates a wide variety of activities), I do mean to suggest that fitness models are not the only ideal for female physical fitness. In fact they

are a somewhat poor one for many types of athletes.

3. The assumption that there is one aesthetic goal to which we should all aspire. Some women want big muscles. Some want to be super-lean. Some women with low bodyfat have breast implants; some prefer the sleekness of small breasts. Everyone's values about physical appearance are different. Moreover, people have different genetic gifts. A small, stocky woman is going to waste her life if she tries forever to look like a female basketball player. A big, muscular woman is likewise going to experience a world of disappointment if she directs all her efforts towards being little and cute. Many, many fit women and female athletes don't look like fitness models and are very happy with this state of affairs. People who write me to tell me that they find my legs too big are barking up the wrong tree. I want my legs to be bigger dammit!

4. You will achieve the appearance that is right for you, given your training parameters and genetic gifts/limitations. Don't try to look like someone else. Try to look like yourself, only fitter. If you have big muscular legs, use them to squat with. If you have narrow hips, take up running. If you have wide shoulders and big hands and feet, enjoy beating the hell out of everyone else at swimming.

5. The world does not need more pictures of women in bikinis. People who want to see fitness models can go to the bazillion fitness model sites online. I don't bother with that shit here because it takes space away from lifting information, and frankly I get enough email from lecherous weirdos already. Furthermore, beginners often get very turned off by images of apparent "perfection" (I use that term advisedly) because it seems so unattainable. It's much more inspiring for many people to know that fitness is something which anyone and everyone can do to see benefits. Plus, I'm not good enough with Photoshop to airbrush in bigger shoulders and better thigh definition.

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Part 2: Not Even Models Look Like Models

6. Even fitness models don't look like fitness models. The fitness industry is about as truthful as the sideshow industry. Let's break this down.

Low bodyfat. By and large, fitness models are photographed only when they are in "contest shape", which means that they have dieted down to a low bodyfat for a short period of time. In the "offseason", most carry a higher bodyfat level because extremely low bodyfat levels are physiologically unmanageable. Many fitness shows hosted by models are filmed only a few weeks out of the year for this reason. And by the way, dieting down to 10-12% bodyfat is much, much less exciting than you would think. You do not feel sexy and attractive. You feel hungry. All you can think about is how crappy you feel, how hard it is to concentrate on anything, and how you would kill your own momma for a bag of Cheetos.

Photographic tricks. Start with the basics of lighting, angles, and posing. Posing in itself is an art. Posers must learn how to present their body so their "flaws" are hidden or camouflaged, and their best features are emphasized. Ever wonder why we don't see too many "after" shots where the subject is posed slouching and photographed with a cheap flash camera? Things also look different

in reality than on film. We all know people who are "photogenic", which means they look good in pictures, and we all know people who are attractive but don't photograph well (my sister, an attractive woman in person, seems to be doomed to have her life photographically recorded in unflattering ways). Many photogenic people look too angular or "imperfect" in person, yet their face comes beautifully to life through the camera lens. Add the magic of Photoshop and airbrushing. Hell, a good computer graphic artist could make me look like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (although they probably couldn't help my little problem of being incapable of sinking a basket).

Extreme dieting. I've already mentioned dieting. However I should add that this isn't your run of the mill eat-celery-sticks-for-a-few-days kind of diet. This is a diet that spans up to 20 weeks at a time, and involves a highly regimented eating pattern. We're talking food scales and measuring cups which dole out precise amounts of brown rice and chicken breasts. We're talking Shaolin monk level of spiritual and physical discipline. We're also talking about mommy's little helper: drugs.

Drug use. Some fitness models DO use anabolic steroids, just like female bodybuilders. Other drugs used are thermogenics, diuretics, appetite suppressants, amphetamines, and the plethora of "gray market" bodybuilding supplements.

Wardrobe, hair, tanning, makeup. Pretty standard stuff for a fashion shoot, really. Tanning is crucial because it emphasizes muscle definition, as does applying something shiny like oil or an iridescent powder. Often a topical bronzer is applied over a base tan. In person it sometimes looks like a weird orange colour.

Tricks of the trade. This means stuff like aluminum or painted wood plates so it looks like the person is lifting a ton (I have aluminum and wood plates at my gym; they're designed to be the height of 45 lb. plates but lighter... I don't mind people thinking I'm lifting 135 lbs. over my head!). Duct tape or masking tape is a must. Drag queens and models alike know that it helps prop up cleavage and can be used to pull back skin to increase visual definition. Two-way tape or Bikini Bite helps stop the inevitable wedgie or embarrassing exposure which is a risk with tiny bathing suits. Pre-photo dehydration (achieved usually with the help of drugs) is crucial for optimizing definition, flattening tummies, and leaning out faces.

Surgery. A nip here, a tuck there, a little fat sucked from here, a little collagen added there. Breast implants and lifts, tummy tucks, calf implants, nose jobs, chin jobs, etc. etc. etc. Nothing wrong with surgery--after all, it makes sense if your face and body is your living--but let's not pretend that it's Ma Nature's handiwork.

Again, this isn't to denigrate the hard work of women who work as fitness models. But it's a job like any other. Fitness models don't crawl out of bed with a hangover and raging PMS and immediately have someone snap their picture with a cheap Instamatic. Their representation is a carefully planned event and construction of an image, which has little to do with them as people.

7. This is a bit of a tangential issue, but frankly I am sick of other people telling me what I should look like. As women we get subjected to lots of commentary on our physical appearances. Male strangers tell us to smile, they ogle our breasts, they scream "Nice ass!" or "Hey fatsol!" from passing cars.

We're all well aware that we are judged every day on how our bodies look. I would be lying to you if I said I didn't care about how I looked. BUT we should look good on our own terms, without other people feeling that they have the right to judge us or tell us how we should look. My ideal for myself is different than many other people's ideal for me, which is fine as long as they keep it to themselves. Besides, according to the media ideal we're never good enough anyway, so ya might as well divert all that negative mental energy you waste on worrying about it. In media ideal terms, there's so much wrong with me that the only thing to be done is burn the whole house down and start again! Hahaha! Oh wait, my teeth are straight. Those can stay.

I am a normal woman. I am not a fitness model. I work out in sloppy gym wear with no makeup, and I get dirty and sweaty and messy-haired. My breasts are not lifted and separated; they are mashed onto my chest by my cheapo sports bra. When I forget to shave my legs I don't really care. I am in there to work hard, to lift some heavy shit, and to forget about how my body looks in favor of thinking about what my body does. After having had a few injuries and illnesses, I am happy that the old girl works at all! Can I get out of bed in the morning without pain and make it to the coffeemaker? If so, then yay body!

That is the point of this site: weight training and fitness in general are for everybody and every body! Yes, you will look better and feel better with weight training. I know that I do. But sorry, you're not going to see pictures of me stuffed into a bathing suit. Let's just deal with it and move on.