

**Allan Spiers**

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***TWH: With a focus on fitness models, do you feel your work contributes at all to our culture's unhealthy relationship with body image? If not, why?***

**AS:** This is probably the most direct and sincere answer to your question, and it will be long because it is very complex. Body image anxiety is the invention of the individual. It is not the responsibility of the whole to heal an individual's insecurities. We have to examine this phenomenon from a realistic and unapologetic standpoint, however unpopular. These individuals I shoot are real people. They exist, and their results are attainable by almost everyone if one were to demonstrate the force of will it would take to achieve them. Why is this lack of will the fault of the individual who achieves society's image of beauty?

People want others to enable their lack of will by telling them it is ok to fit shame, or that presentation celebrating the standards of fitness are destructive. As a fitness photographer, I spend a lot of time around fitness models. They share their experiences, and they have shown the messages people send them. They are constantly told they are ugly, they are mocked, they are told they are unintelligent, they have been entrapped and publicly humiliated. This isn't to dismiss the experience of those who perceive their self-image negatively, but confidence and self-love can only be found in the self. No external force can manifest that.

We know a model who is a close personal friend. He is quite possibly one of the most attractive people we have ever met. He is well known, and extremely popular in the fitness industry, but he struggles with insecurity. He does not find himself attractive, and has extremely low self-esteem. It is not the physical body that cures body image anxiety, it is something found in the soul. If an individual is deeply troubled by the perpetuation of beauty standards they do not exhibit and this results in an inability to produce a happy functional life within society, that is too clinical for any artist to overcome. They could view any number of projects that celebrate different body types but the psychological trauma would be greatly unaffected.