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The Feminine Self-Concept of Muscular Women on the Social Media Platform Instagram

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ABSTRACT

Historically, the female body has been the object of patriarchal beauty standards that glorify thinness. This research aims to examine how muscular women negotiate and construct their self-concepts through symbolic interactionism on Instagram. This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach. Primary data collection was conducted through participant observation and the analysis of social media content from six active members of the Celebrity Fitness center in Jakarta. All data were comprehensively analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The results indicate that muscular women initiated their identity negotiation in the physical space by rejecting conventional beauty standards. This physical capital, integrating masculine strength and feminine softness, was strategically represented in the virtual space. They produced significant symbols through stages of visual curation and verbal discourse to dismantle stereotypes of female physical weakness. This digital representation culminated in a psychological alignment process. The reception of quantitative appreciation through like buttons and qualitative appreciation in comment sections acted as external validation instruments. This social network support triggered an increase in self-esteem and facilitated their achieving an optimal state of psychological congruence. The real self, which had densified, completely aligned with the ideal self projected on the virtual display. This study concludes that digital validation acts as the ultimate instrument perfecting the autonomy and existence of muscular women. Practically, the broader society is urged to cultivate a more inclusive space of tolerance to celebrate the diversity of women's physical expressions without the shackles of obsolete gender constructs.

Keywords: Digital Validation; Instagram; Muscular Women; Self-Concept; Symbolic Interactionism.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the female body has been the object of patriarchal beauty standards that glorify thinness. However, women's bodily autonomy continues to be dynamically negotiated over time (Benedicta, 2011). Currently, conventional beauty standards are facing resistance as physical fitness trends emerge. Women no longer merely pursue a thin physique; they actively strive to build dense, strong muscles. This phenomenon aligns with postfeminist ideals that promote physical strength as a new form of female attractiveness (Washington & Economides, 2015). This shift indicates that bodily authority has transitioned into an instrument for self-identity empowerment.

The shift in physical aesthetic standards is now expressed massively on Instagram. This virtual space facilitates users in broadly reconstructing and distributing alternative beauty concepts (Irza et al., 2021). Muscular women utilize Instagram as a strategic arena to display their digital gender subjectivity. They upload digital footprints, such as photos and videos of weightlifting activities, to represent a new identity (Nichols et al., 2024). This practice of visual curation proves that social media functions beyond a mere repository for personal documentation. Social media has become a stage for actively negotiating the meaning of femininity.

The existence of this digital interaction space directly brings sociopsychological implications for its users. The Instagram platform features feedback mechanisms, such as like buttons and comment sections, which function as instruments of social appreciation. These mechanisms can trigger existential anxiety when users feel left behind by virtual interaction trends (Widiayanti et al., 2024). Consequently, users

actively seek external validation from their follower communities. The intensity of Instagram use and the receipt of external validation demonstrate a measurable correlation with user self-esteem (Evelin & Adishesa, 2020). Public appreciation in the virtual space now serves as a primary mirror for individuals to assess and validate their own existence.

The efforts of muscular women to seek digital validation do not always proceed without sociological barriers. Physical appearances that break gender bias boundaries frequently trigger negative sentiments from certain societal groups. Virtual interaction spaces remain dominated by patriarchal notions that attempt to discipline the female body to conform to conventional expectations of softness (Phipps, 2023). Women displaying physical strength on the internet are highly vulnerable to derogatory comments or questions regarding their gender orientation. This situation creates tangible social tension in the virtual public sphere. Muscular women must continuously negotiate societal stigma while striving to maintain the physical identity they believe to be authentic.

The dynamics of identity negotiation in virtual space are fundamentally rooted in social practices that occur in physical spaces. Commercial fitness centers, such as Celebrity Fitness in the Jakarta metropolitan area, serve as more than mere physical training grounds for female weightlifters. These commercial fitness facilities have transformed into exclusive arenas representing urban lifestyles and middle-class affluence. The spatial characteristics centered on individual physical achievement within these premium fitness centers directly shape members' behavioral patterns as they construct a muscular physique. This physical reality serves as the material foundation on which these women project their ideal images onto the digital display.

Previous studies have examined the identity representation of female fitness enthusiast groups on social media. Amalia et al. (2016) investigated the formation of self-concept among street workout community members through nonverbal and verbal communication on Instagram. However, that study focused exclusively on outdoor community phenomena characterized by communal traits. A literature gap exists regarding the representational dynamics of muscular women active in commercial fitness centers, which tend to exhibit more individualistic characteristics. Furthermore, previous research has not comprehensively integrated digital symbol analysis with psychological evaluations of self-alignment. This literature gap serves as the fundamental basis for the sociological novelty of this article.

To address this gap, this research simultaneously integrates two primary theoretical frameworks. This study relies on Symbolic Interactionism theory to analyze how individuals manage meaning through the use of significant symbols in the communication process (Mead, 2015). This framework provides the argumentative basis to dissect the visual and verbal representations produced by muscular women on Instagram. Furthermore, this research employs Self-Concept theory to examine how

individuals react to phenomenal reality in their effort to maintain the completeness of their self-structure (Rogers, 2003). This psychological framework analyzes their self-alignment mechanisms when confronting instruments of public validation. The integration of these two theories is expected to provide a sharp analytical tool for holistically dissecting empirical findings.

This research aims to examine how muscular women negotiate and construct their self-concepts through symbolic interactionism on Instagram. Operationally, this study has two primary focuses. First, this research analyzes the visual representations and verbal symbols produced by muscular women as expressive forms of alternative feminine identity. Second, this study explores the role of digital validation mechanisms through interactive follower feedback. These mechanisms act as external instruments influencing the alignment process between the real self and the ideal self within the virtual public sphere ecosystem. Theoretically, the findings of this research are expected to expand the discourse on the sociology of the body regarding the redefinition of gender identity in the digital era. Practically, the outputs of this study are expected to provide societal insights into the dynamics of acceptance and tolerance toward the diversity of women's physical expressions.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to dissect meaning construction in physical and digital spaces (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of a qualitative approach is based on the need to deeply explore subjective experiences and social interaction behaviors. This research specifically employed participant observation and social media content analysis. These methods were selected as a strategic adaptation to frame digital sociology phenomena factually. Through this approach, the researcher objectively and quantitatively captured the empirical reality of symbolic interactionist practices on Instagram.

The primary subjects in this study were female weightlifting enthusiasts registered as active members at the Celebrity Fitness center in the Jakarta area. Informant selection was conducted through a purposive sampling technique with highly specific criteria (Spradley, 2016). These criteria included women who routinely perform weight training, have transformed their physique to become muscular, and actively publish their fitness activities on social media. These population and location boundaries were established to ensure that the informants represent the urban middle-class group that makes muscle building part of an exclusive lifestyle.

Primary data collection in this study relied on two main observational instruments. The first instrument was the digital observation of the research informants' Instagram accounts. This observation aimed to record visual data, such as body poses and photo curation, as well as textual data, including post captions and the use of specific emoji symbols. Furthermore, this digital observation documented

traces of social interaction, such as the number of like buttons and the presence of appreciative sentences in the comment sections. The second instrument was field notes derived from direct observation and interaction at the fitness center. These field notes contained narrative extractions regarding initial motivations, physical aesthetic interpretations, and the identity internalization processes of the informants.

Secondary data collection was conducted to strengthen the research's epistemological foundation and analytical framework. These secondary data were collected through rigorous and systematic literature searches. The literature sources included authoritative works on behavioral sociology and clinical psychology. The researcher also compiled a selection of recent scientific journal articles relevant to the sociology of the body, digital culture, and the subjectivity of gender representation. All of this literature was meticulously curated to construct a research gap analysis and facilitate academic dialogue during the field findings discussion phase.

The collected data were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This technique was implemented through a series of systematic and structured stages. The initial stage began with an open coding process applied to all field notes and Instagram observation screenshots. The researcher identified recurring patterns in the use of visual symbols, the formulation of verbal symbols, and the emergence of external validation mechanisms. These codes were then grouped into several essential categories. This categorization was specifically designed to map themes of weight training motivation, alternative femininity visuals, the meaning of muscular women, forms of digital validation, and the foundation of self-concept.

The results of this thematic categorization were then critically analyzed using theoretical frameworks to address the formulated research objectives. The analysis at this stage focused on two primary operational instruments. The first operational instrument dissected visual and verbal representations using the concepts of mind, self, and society from Symbolic Interactionism theory (Mead, 2015). The second operational instrument dissected the alignment dynamics between the real self and the ideal self using the tenets of Self-Concept theory (Rogers, 2003). The synthesis of these two analytical processes was used to evaluate the impact of digital comments and appreciation on fluctuations in self-esteem among muscular women in the virtual ecosystem.

To ensure the validity of the findings, this study rigorously employed data triangulation (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher cross-referenced the informants' narrative claims within the field notes with concrete evidence of their curation behaviors on social media. Additionally, the researcher integrated participant observation in the physical space with the analysis of digital interaction traces in the virtual space. The application of this validity test ensures that all sociological interpretations presented in the manuscript are free of personal bias and meet the methodological rigor standards of scientific publications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Meaning Construction of Muscular Body Aesthetics in the Fitness Center Ecosystem

The sociological construction regarding women’s physical autonomy and representation in this study was explored through the empirical experiences of six informants. These six women represented a range of ages and occupational backgrounds in the metropolitan area. They consistently engaged in weightlifting activities at the Celebrity Fitness center in the Jakarta area. Their presence at the facility was not merely to fulfill basic physical movement needs. Physical activity in commercial fitness centers has become an inseparable part of their daily routines. Fitness centers serve as ritual arenas for identity-seeking among the urban middle class (Jodamus, 2025). Weightlifting has now shifted its function to become a symbol of a healthy lifestyle for modern women in urban areas (Fitriana & Darmawan, 2021).

The informants’ initial motivation in selecting a workout location was closely related to urban consumption behavior. They consciously chose Celebrity Fitness because the facility is strategically located within a shopping mall. This location selection provided them with the convenience to conduct other activities after exercising. They could directly shop or enjoy coffee in the mall area without having to travel far. This spatial reality indicates that the physical form of muscular women goes hand in hand with a sense of fulfillment in life. The commercial physical space facilitates the need for body formation while simultaneously providing a means for social recreation.

Table 1. Essential Phenomenological Themes and Meanings in Physical Spaces

No.	Theme	Category	Phenomenological Meaning
1	Weightlifting Motivation	Physical Condition & Needs	Body transformation to overcome obesity or increase muscle mass from an overly thin body condition, as well as achieve functional fitness.
2	Feminine Visuals	Aesthetic Representation	Rejection of conventional thin standards to construct an upright, dense, and muscular body without abandoning facial makeup and hijab identities.
3	The Meaning of Muscular Femininity	Gender Identity	The muscular body is interpreted as a symbol of independence, increased physical capacity in daily activities, and resistance against stereotypes of female physical weakness.

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

The informants’ decision to engage in weightlifting was driven by dissatisfaction with their initial physical conditions. Field findings based on Table 1 regarding Theme 1 on weightlifting motivation revealed the existence of two distinct poles of physical issues. Informants RS and RI initially had obese bodies.

They utilized weight equipment to lose weight while simultaneously sculpting a more muscular physique. Conversely, informants RD and DA initially had overly thin body shapes. They strictly focused on weightlifting to increase muscle mass and achieve a denser body. Scientifically, this weight-training practice has indeed been shown to significantly reduce body fat percentage (Afgenesya et al., 2024).

The meaning assigned to weightlifting activities did not stop at external body modification. The informants also experienced functional benefits that directly affected their physical health. The reference to Theme 3 in Table 1 regarding the meaning of muscular femininity demonstrates that physical strength supports independence in daily activities. Informant AP specifically acknowledged an increase in her physical capacity. She stated that her weightlifting routine no longer left her excessively tired when climbing stairs. This improvement in physiological function strengthened their belief that weightlifting is crucial to the seamless execution of women's activities.

The physical transformation experienced by the informants triggered a shift in their perspective on aesthetic standards. They firmly rejected conventional beauty standards that consistently demand women to possess thin and small-dimensioned bodies. They consciously held no desire to become thin, as society generally demands. Instead, they desired an upright, dense, and muscular body. This rejection of the thin body hegemony is a concrete manifestation of women's bodily autonomy. Women have full rights to determine their own physical forms as a form of resistance against patriarchal standardization (Benedicta, 2011).

Despite their muscular bodies, the informants continued to identify as women. They defined this physical identity as a combination of strength and softness. They ensured that their muscle size remained within female aesthetic boundaries. They continued to use facial makeup, wear hijabs for those who are Muslim, and maintain polite behavioral characteristics. This identity negotiation proves that the concept of strong women frequently collides with gender bias stereotypes. Athletic women are expected to maintain aspects of softness and physical sensuality to be accepted by society (Turelli et al., 2023). This aligns with postfeminist culture, which promotes women's bodily strength yet continues to bind it to heteronormative attractiveness (Washington & Economides, 2015).

The meaning of this alternative aesthetic was concretely recorded through the research informants' visual and textual documentation. Field observations indicated that they tended to openly display their muscular bodies. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in Figure 1, sourced from RS's Instagram account. The post stated that the fitness center aims to promote health. However, RS personally stated that she preferred a supple, dense, and well-shaped body. In the same post, she also wrote a photo caption reading "Strong not Skinny" along

with a hope to possess a muscular, sexy body. This written statement constitutes empirical evidence of the informant's internally held shift in beauty definitions.

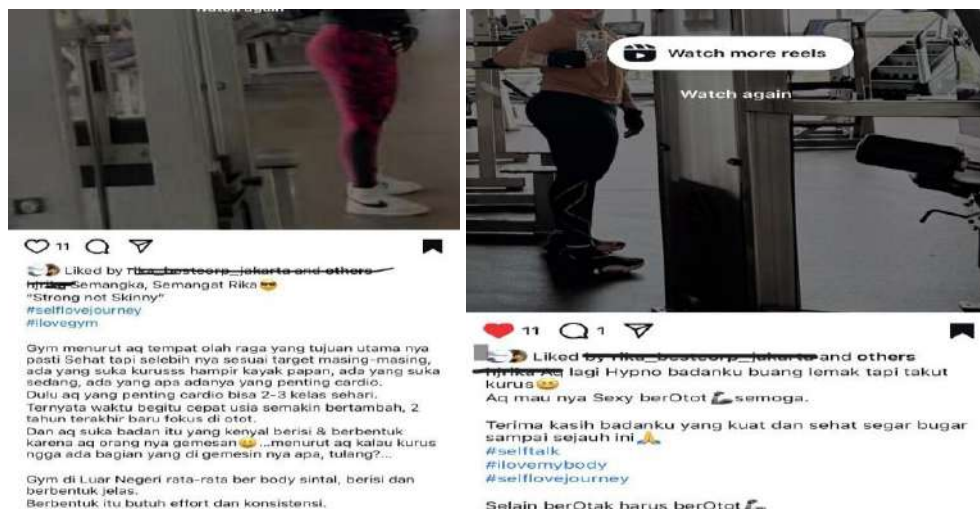


Figure 1. Post Depicting Body Image (RS's Personal Instagram)

The entire process of body transformation and meaning-making at this fitness facility acted as a material foundation for the informants. Muscles built through weightlifting discipline constituted physical capital holding high social value for their group. However, achieving physical aesthetics in this closed space was deemed not to have provided complete identity satisfaction. They required a broader stage to declare their status as women who are simultaneously strong and feminine. This need for public recognition drove them to transition their physical identities into the virtual space. The symbols of physical strength formed in the real world would subsequently be curated and renegotiated through digital interaction practices on social media platforms.

B. The Practice of Symbolic Interactionism through Visual and Verbal Representation on Instagram

The need for a broader space for self-actualization drove muscular women to bring their physical identities from the gym to social media. Instagram was selected as the primary platform to represent this muscular bodily autonomy to the public. This digital platform no longer functions merely as a record of personal activities. The virtual space has transformed into a highly dynamic arena for negotiating gender subjectivity (Nichols et al., 2024). Female fitness enthusiasts utilize Instagram's visual and textual features to broadly project the manifestation of their new identities.

The process of identity representation in the digital space can be profoundly dissected using the Symbolic Interactionism Theory framework. Mead (2015) postulated that human interaction is perpetually mediated by significant symbols. Significant symbols are gestures that elicit the same response in both the speaker and the audience. In the context of this study, the muscular body and weightlifting activities are no longer viewed merely as biological entities. These physical entities

have been deliberately reconstructed into significant symbols to communicate messages of female strength to society.

The production of significant symbols on Instagram commenced with a meticulous visual curation stage. Field observations demonstrated that the informants consciously arranged photo compositions before uploading them to the virtual public sphere. They precisely selected the optimal shooting angles from the left or right side of the body. This was done to maximally accentuate the definition of muscle curves. This curation process constitutes a concrete manifestation of intrapersonal communication practices. They engaged in selective perception and cognitive processing to determine which visual self-image was the most representative (Kustiawan et al., 2022).

This visual selection stage reflects the operation of the mind element within the informants. According to Mead (2015), the mind is not merely a physical neurological structure. The mind is a continuous process of internal conversation. They engaged in internal conversations with themselves while posing with clenched fists holding a barbell. They interpreted muscular arms internally as symbols of discipline and resilience. This internal meaning-making closely aligns with the details of Themes 2 and 3 in the previous Table 1, which encompass the rejection of thin standards and the achievement of physical independence.



Figure 2. Visual Symbols on the Social Media Platform Instagram (Personal Instagrams of RI and AP)

The representation of these visual symbols was factually documented in the track records of the informants' social media accounts. Figure 2 displays photos uploaded to the Instagram accounts of RI and AP. The photos predominantly highlighted the use of weight equipment, specifically dumbbells, alongside specific fitness attire. The presence of inanimate objects such as dumbbells within the photo frame serves a highly crucial sociological function. The equipment did not merely serve as a decorative ornament. The dumbbell acted absolutely as an instrument legitimizing their identities as authentic female weightlifting enthusiasts.

The complexity of this visual representation appeared increasingly dynamic among research informants wearing religious attributes. Muslim women continued to display their strong physical identities without abandoning the obligation to wear the hijab. They created visuals featuring long-sleeved sportswear and muscle-flexing poses. This practice proves that the hijab no longer restricts women's physical movement in the secular public sphere. Instead, the hijab flexibly negotiates with modern lifestyles and sports dress code regulations (Hendra et al., 2025). This sociological negotiation birthed a new identity subcategory of the physically resilient Muslim woman.

The practice of uploading visual content did not always proceed through a lengthy selection process. Field observations also revealed direct content uploading while informants were training intensively at the fitness center. This spontaneous action is a manifestation of the self element freed from social control. Mead (2015) defined this spontaneous organism response to social situations as an analytical phase termed the "I" phase. This phase enabled freedom of expression to demonstrate the reality of their physical sports activities without excessive image manipulation.

In addition to exploiting visual aspects, the informants also strengthened their identity negotiation through verbal symbol instruments. These verbal symbols were manifested in writing through the formulation of photo captions accompanying each image upload. The use of this text aimed to guide audience interpretation toward its intended meanings. Through these texts, they attempted to dismantle the passive beauty standards that have historically dominated social media culture. They produced new discourses that radically reconstructed the concept of female beauty on Instagram, making it synonymous with physical strength and health (Irza et al., 2021).



Figure 3. Verbal Symbols on the Social Media Platform Instagram (Personal Instagrams of RI and RD)

The concrete form of this verbal discourse production can be observed directly in the documentation of Figure 3. Screenshots from the Instagram accounts of RI and RD displayed text narratives that were both provocative and motivating. RI's account wrote the sentence "Don't be Lazy to Workout," while RD's account wrote a jokingly-toned complaint that her body still felt stiff. The use of these verbal messages was further reinforced by the insertion of emoji symbols depicting a flexing arm muscle. These texts and emojis were meticulously arranged to construct a public persona of women highly dedicated to fitness.

The entire series of curation activities and the production of visual and verbal symbols on Instagram ultimately converged on a single interactional objective. The informants were not merely speaking to themselves in a vacuum. They were projecting symbolic stimuli to their digital audiences with highly specific expectations. They anticipated replies or social appreciation capable of validating this new identity. The dynamics of receiving responses from followers became the most determining stage for their psychological condition. This external response would determine the success rate of the self-concept alignment process for muscular women within the virtual interaction ecosystem.

C. Digital Validation and the Dynamics of Muscular Women's Self-Concept Alignment

The practice of visual and verbal symbol production on Instagram does not stop as a one-way communication process. The social media ecosystem demands reciprocal mechanisms that directly shape its users' sociopsychological conditions. The symbols of physical strength uploaded to the virtual space now require recognition from external audiences. This need for recognition drives muscular women to actively monitor their followers' responses on the digital platform. The intensity of social media use and the quantity of external validation received are directly correlated with individual self-esteem levels (Evelin & Adishesa, 2020). The Instagram interaction space now acts as a social mirror determining the validity of their physical identities.

The dynamics of this pursuit of digital validation can be comprehensively dissected using the Self-Concept Theory framework. Rogers (2003) postulated that every organism exists within a phenomenal field that acts as its subjective reality. In this digital context, Instagram has transformed into an extension of the informants' phenomenal field. The virtual space becomes an arena where organisms interact, evaluate themselves, and absorb values from their social environment. The self-structure of these muscular women is formed and maintained through evaluative interactions occurring within this virtual ecosystem.

This self-evaluation process in the digital space was clearly recorded through the continued extraction of the research informants' phenomenological data.

The field data tracing successfully mapped two final themes specifically focusing on feedback mechanisms and peak identity construction in cyberspace. The conceptual details regarding these two themes centered on the virtual ecosystem are systematically presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Essential Phenomenological Themes and Meanings in the Virtual Ecosystem

No.	Theme	Category	Phenomenological Meaning
1	Digital Validation	Social Interaction	The process of social consideration in selecting content, as well as the reception of quantitative (like buttons) and qualitative (positive comments) appreciation functioning as external recognition.
2	Self-Concept	Psychological Structure	The peak of self-identification as a resilient, unique female figure exceeding male physical capacity, culminating in optimal self-esteem enhancement.

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

Based on Theme 1 in Table 2, the research informants demonstrated a highly rigorous social consideration process. Before uploading weightlifting content, they considered potential evaluations from their Instagram followers. This consideration represents the operation of the social consciousness element or the social object (me) within the individual. They realized that digital existence is highly vulnerable to existential anxiety phenomena if they fail to attain public recognition (Widiayanti et al., 2024). Consequently, they actively followed digital social trend dynamics to ensure their content was appreciated by their virtual friendship networks (Natalia et al., 2025).

This social consideration ultimately led to the formation of specific identity claims depicted in Theme 2. The informants consciously formulated their self-concepts with a range of superior attributes. RD, AP, and RS identified themselves as strong feminine women. AF saw herself as a unique individual because she could lift heavy weights despite wearing modest clothing and a hijab. Meanwhile, DA and RI felt proud and cool because their physical capacity exceeded the average strength of men. This self-concept construction demonstrates that virtual communities and peer groups are primary drivers in shaping new understandings of beauty standards (Amalia et al., 2016; Mahanani et al., 2020).

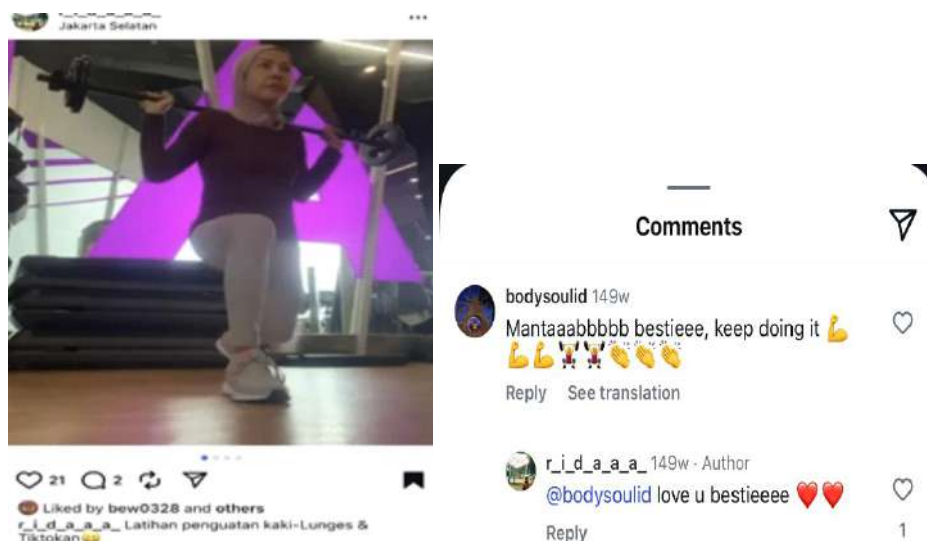
These superior identity claims obtained concrete legitimation through quantitative appreciation instruments on the Instagram platform. The like button serves as the primary metric for gauging social acceptance of the informants' muscular body images. The number of likes on each post was interpreted as direct support from the digital society. This quantification of appreciation had immediate psychological effects on the content creators. The higher the interaction numbers obtained, the more they felt their existence was recognized within the virtual social hierarchy.



Figure 4. Representation of Quantitative Appreciation (DA's Personal Instagram)

Empirical evidence regarding this quantitative legitimation can be observed in the visual documentation of the informants' activities. Figure 4 displays a post from DA's Instagram account. In the video post, she demonstrated her ability to lift 70 kilograms. This extreme physical achievement for a laywoman's standard successfully attracted the attention of her followers. The post garnered dozens of likes and numerous comment interactions. This numerical evidence directly confirms a positive correlation between the display of muscular body image and the self-confidence levels of fitness center members (Taniady & Murti, 2024).

Beyond quantitative support, muscular women also require qualitative validation to strengthen their psychological foundation. This qualitative validation manifests as verbal interactions through Instagram comment sections. Complimentary comments from other users play a fundamental role in confirming their physical identities. These textual messages were not merely read as strings of words. The informants internalized them as valid proof that society recognizes and celebrates the bodily autonomy they have fought for at the fitness center.



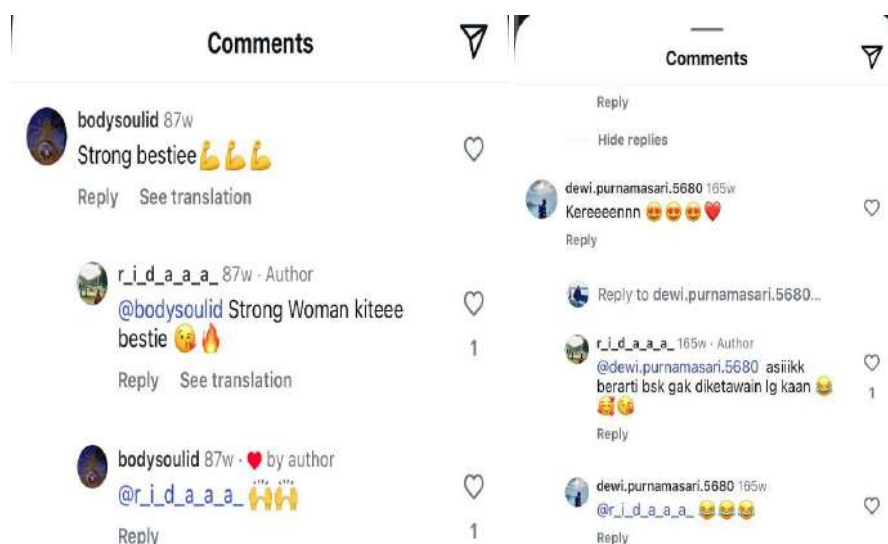


Figure 5. Representation of Comment Interactions (RD's Personal Instagram)

The dynamics of this motivational message exchange were explicitly documented in the documentation shown in Figure 5. A screenshot from RD's Instagram account showed the comment section with inter-user interactions. The account @bodysoulid provided verbal appreciation with the complimentary phrase "Strong bestie." RD subsequently responded to the compliment with a reply affirming their group identity, namely "Strong Woman kiteee bestie" [We are Strong Women, bestie]. This reciprocal interaction proves the high role of peer group support in enhancing positive self-image and strengthening women's self-concept in the public sphere (Alexandrina et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, this validation pursuit process is not always free from sociological threats. The virtual space continues to inherit patriarchal values that frequently attempt to discipline the female body. Women displaying masculine strength are frequently confronted with negative comments or sentiments degrading their achievements. This practice constitutes a form of digital-based gender violence deliberately produced to return women to domestic compliance boundaries (Phipps, 2023). This discrimination threat forces muscular women to possess strong self-defense mechanisms so that their psychological structures are not destroyed by external rejection.

The entire series of physical transformations and digital validation dynamics ultimately converged on the goal of achieving psychological congruence. Female fitness enthusiasts continuously strive to balance the reality of their current conditions with their desired self-expectations. The psychological conditions and final resolutions of these six research informants were comprehensively mapped through a structural comparison matrix. The matrix details regarding this inner negotiation are presented entirely in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Comparison of Real Self and Ideal Self among Research Informants

Informant	Initial Condition (Past Real Self)	Virtual Identity (Ideal Self Projection)	Actual Condition (New Real Self/Congruence)
AP	Possessed low fitness levels and easily fatigued in physical activities.	Desired to represent herself as a woman highly concerned with a fitness lifestyle.	Successfully constructed arm muscles, routine is no longer hindered by fatigue, and she feels proud as a strong feminine woman.
RS	Experienced overweight issues (obesity) and minimal physical activity.	Desired to be recognized as a resilient, lean figure who consistently trains hard.	Drastically lost weight, sculpted back muscles, and received high appreciation and validation on Instagram.
RI	Possessed a large, fatty body posture and lacked confidence in her appearance.	Desired a muscular physique to exceed male physical strength limits.	Routinely lifts heavy weights, body structure densified, and achieved personal pride due to social media compliments.
AF	Felt she had a weak physique and restricted movement due to religious attributes.	Attempted to break the hijab-wearing woman stereotype by displaying weightlifting strength.	Solidly formed arm muscles beneath modest clothing and identifies herself as a unique Muslim woman.
DA	Possessed an overly thin, small body and proportionally lacked muscle mass.	Ambitioned to achieve a symmetrical and resilient female bodybuilder physique.	Capable of lifting weights to 70 kilograms, body enlarged and densified, and self-confidence soared due to digital interactions.
RD	Thin, weak, and felt she lacked an aesthetically pleasing body shape.	Desired an upright, muscularly sexy body, and obtained recognition from her peer group.	Body became muscular, proud to call herself a strong woman, and enjoys active validation from comment sections.

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

The comprehensive data in Table 3 can be precisely analyzed using the congruence proposition proposed by Rogers (2003). In the initial condition, all informants experienced psychological incongruence. They felt anxious and dissatisfied with obese or overly thin body conditions. This initial condition was perceived as a threat to their self-structure. To overcome this tension, they took concrete corrective actions through weightlifting discipline. They subsequently explored these new experiences within a safe and supportive environment, namely through the Instagram platform. Positive audience responses facilitated their full integration of these new experiences into their self-structures (Rogers, 2003).

The reception of this external validation triggered an optimal condition of psychological congruence for the subjects. All their sensory experiences during exercise and all the digital appreciation they received were successfully assimilated into a consistent relationship. The real self, which had densified and become muscular, is now perfectly aligned with the ideal self they projected on the virtual display. The success of this self-concept alignment proves that Instagram validation is not merely a satisfier of shallow narcissism. Digital validation acts as the ultimate instrument perfecting the autonomy, self-esteem, and existence of muscular women in the modern era.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that women's bodily authority has dynamically transformed into an instrument of identity empowerment through physical and virtual spaces. Female weightlifters in commercial fitness centers began their identity negotiation by rejecting conventional beauty standards. They consciously sculpted muscular bodies to overcome past physical dissatisfaction. This physical modification produced physical capital integrating elements of masculine strength with the charm of feminine softness. This physical reality acts as the primary foundation before they project their self-images into the public sphere.

This physical capital was subsequently represented strategically through the social media platform Instagram. Female fitness enthusiasts engaged in symbolic interactionism practices through meticulous stages of visual curation and verbal discourse formulation. They transformed body poses, weight equipment, and photo caption texts into significant symbols. These symbols were produced to dismantle stereotypes of female physical weakness that have historically dominated digital culture. This practice demonstrates that the virtual ecosystem serves as a primary stage for women to disseminate alternative beauty discourses on a massive scale.

The distribution of these identity symbols in the virtual space culminated in highly crucial psychological alignment dynamics. Quantitative appreciation instruments, such as like buttons, and qualitative appreciation through comment sections acted as social mirrors for female fitness enthusiasts. The receipt of this external validation directly led to an increase in muscular women's self-esteem. Support from digital friendship networks facilitated their achieving an optimal level of psychological congruence. They successfully aligned the real self, which had densified, with the ideal self projected on the virtual display.

Based on these conclusions, this study formulates several academic implications and recommendations. Theoretically, future studies in the sociology of the body need to expand their research focus to social media algorithms and their correlation with digital-based gender violence. In practice, social media platform developers are advised to strengthen content moderation policies to protect women from patriarchal sentiment. Furthermore, the broader society is urged to begin cultivating a more inclusive, tolerant space. This tolerance is urgently needed to celebrate the diversity of women's physical expressions without being restricted by obsolete gender constructs.

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