

Intrapersonal communication among digital-age mothers on constructing postpartum body image

Givania Diwiya Citta¹, Dasrun Hidayat², Zikri Fachrul Nurhadi³, Nofha Rina⁴

¹School of Communication and Social Sciences, Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia

²Communication & Design Faculty, Adhirajasa Reswara Sanjaya University, Bandung, Indonesia

³Communication & Information Science Faculty, Garut University, Garut, Indonesia

⁴School of Communication & Business, Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: The mom-body positivity movement is trending on social media to encourage mothers to find comfort in their new maternal bodies. In reality, many postpartum mothers experience antipathy for their body changes, and the way they deal with the stress of postpartum body image can impact their adaptation to the role of motherhood. **Purpose:** This study seeks to understand how intrapersonal communication within digital-age mothers constructs the meaning of postpartum body image. It is expected to motivate mothers to appreciate, accept, and love their maternal bodies. **Methods:** The research adopted the constructivist paradigm and a phenomenological study design, and the subjects were eight first-time mothers who had experienced childbirth within the past two years. **Results:** The study found that a mother's journey to loving her postpartum body is diverse: some can instantly love their bodily changes, while others come to love their bodies later, after receiving positive affirmations from their closest circle. In addition, motherhood content on Instagram can provide virtual support to those who find it difficult to perceive their postpartum body image positively. **Conclusion:** Mothers are the key to happiness in the family. If they are unhappy, the baby is also unhappy. To create a healthy family, mothers require support from a healthy environment to construct a positive image of their postpartum bodies with minimal stress thus carrying out their maternal duties well. **Implications:** This study broadens mothers' definition of beauty, further looks at postpartum mothers' physical and mental well-being, and helps formulate better awareness and education on the meaning of postpartum body image at the individual, familial, and communal levels in Indonesia.

Keywords: Postpartum body image; first-time mothers; digital age; intrapersonal communication; phenomenology

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Correspondence: Givania Diwiya Citta, S. Ikom, Telkom University, Jl. Telekomunikasi No. 1, Terusan Buahbatu, Bojongsoang, Bandung, Jawa Barat 40257, *Email:* givania@student.telkomuniversity.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, especially after the body positivity movement gained traction on social media with the hashtag #BodyPositivity, researchers have begun to focus on the theme of body positivity to provide a holistic understanding of the concept of body image (Alleva et al., 2023). Notably, within the category of women who experience pregnancy and postpartum moments, the term mom-body positivity, referring to the positive body image of mothers, has also gained popularity on social media. The @mother.ly Instagram account has consistently shared posts to encourage mothers to find comfort in their new maternal bodies. Influencers and celebrities on Instagram, such as @meg.boggs, @thegarciadiaries, @theperfectmom, and @katiemcreshaw, have joined this movement and created the hashtag #this_is_postpartum, which has amassed over 18.538 posts where women share their postpartum bodies (Whitman, 2020). As a result, research on positive maternal body image has emerged.

Positive body image means that a person can love and accept their own body, regardless of whether it aligns with societal of the “perfect” body, and can appreciate the uniqueness and functionality of their body (Tiggemann, 2015). The positive body image movement also encourages body acceptance phase, which involves accepting a well-functioning body, appreciating it, feeling proud of it, and being flexible in one’s body image, especially when experiencing various changes in body shape, such as during pregnancy and childbirth (Swami et al., 2021). The mom-body positivity movement arose as mothers were exposed to a perfect image of motherhood on filtered social media platforms, which created unrealistic expectations about postpartum bodies. This pressure forces mothers to look to a certain appearance after giving birth and ultimately leaving them vulnerable (Whitman, 2020).

Body image is a psychological representation of one’s body that consists of behaviors and perceptions of appearance. These perceptions develop through biological, psychological, and social influences. Similarly, during pregnancy and postpartum, body image can be interpreted differently for mothers-to-be and mothers. For

the expectant mother, pregnancy is a complex period. Weight gain is expected in a medical context to support maximum fetal growth, and this is socially accepted. However, after giving birth, mothers often face concerns about whether their bodies will return to ‘normal’ as before pregnancy. In reality, most mothers’ bodies do not immediately return to their pre-pregnancy shape, weight, and size (Hodgkinson et al., 2014).

Some postpartum mothers’ experiences revealed that the weight gained after pregnancy made them sad (Watson et al., 2015). A study found that 68,8% of mothers were not satisfied with their postpartum body weight and shape, especially those who underwent cesarean section (Grajek et al., 2022). Weight gain is seen as a negative issue, especially in cultures where a slim body is idealized. Mothers may lose appreciation for their new maternal bodies, feeling that they no longer fit the local cultural ideals of body image (Hodgkinson et al., 2014). There are also numerous stories of mothers feeling anxious upon seeing their stomachs sagging after childbirth. They fear that their husbands will no longer find them attractive and may turn away, influenced by comments from relatives who suggest that fat mothers are not beautiful. Another study also suggested that mother’s perceptions of their bodies after childbirth vary across three levels: beautiful, somewhat beautiful, and unattractive. These perceptions restrict individuals from freely viewing their bodies (Kertamukti et al., 2018).

There are also contradictions in the messages circulating on social media regarding the meaning of a mother’s postpartum body. For example, medical experts emphasize the importance of breastfeeding, so there are no restrictions on food consumption. Meanwhile, social demands direct mothers to “get back to their original body” so that they limit food consumption. The postpartum mother’s body is considered an object that society must control. Additionally, there are many encouragements from the industry for mothers to immediately reshape their bodies after giving birth, ranging from exercise video tutorials and diet plans to offering fitness classes for mothers (Hodgkinson et al., 2014). A study also found that postpartum mothers are concerned that breastfeeding will affect their appearance, such as causing sagging

breasts, which leads to body dissatisfaction. This proves how mothers objectify their bodies for society. Such thoughts make mothers place more value on bodily appearance rather than bodily function. Cultural norms that compare a mother's postpartum body with pre-pregnancy appearance ideals can be destructive, as they suggest that mothers must be thin, toned, and youthful to be called beautiful. In reality, these idealized body standards are unachievable for postpartum mothers, and it can make them feel vulnerable, which can lead to poor health outcomes such as depression and difficulties in bonding with the baby (Beech et al., 2020). Finally, the mismatch between a mother's body image and the social construction of the ideal mother's body can lead to a sense of body dissatisfaction, making it difficult for mothers to accept their body image.

The way mothers deal with stress arising from postnatal body image experiences can also impact how they construct their maternal identity. Body image also impacts a mother's success in adapting to the role of parenthood (Hodgkinson et al., 2014). The postpartum period can influence a mother's quality of life. Therefore, it is important to examine the negative factors that can affect postpartum mothers. Bodily changes can trigger emotional changes in mothers, such as postpartum anxiety and depressive disorders, which affect 20% of mothers (Brown-Worsham, 2023). A study also found that 32,3% of the factors affecting maternal role competence and satisfaction were related to maternal depression, which states its significant impact on how mothers adapt to their new role (Slomian et al., 2019). For this reason, perceiving postpartum body image positively and appreciating and loving oneself – especially for postpartum mothers – can help them successfully adapt to their role as parents.

Based on the background of the problem described in the previous section, the researcher formulated the focus of the research on postpartum body image for first-time mothers in the digital era. Body image theory can provide an ideal framework to overcome the problem of postpartum mothers' body image. Positive body image is conceptualized as one's appreciation, love, and respect for one's body. It also involves other important aspects such as a broad understanding of beauty, a positive

personality, media exposure, and perceptions of bodily functions (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). A study found that if mothers can appreciate their bodily functions, it affects their relationship with their postpartum bodies and reduces feelings of body shame (Beech et al., 2020). Ultimately, a positive postpartum body image can lead mothers to accept themselves as they are, realizing that their bodies are unique to each mother and designed with particular physical characteristics. With a positive postpartum body image, mothers can perceive that there is no one-size-fits-all ideal body for all life situations (iMom, 2023).

Several previous studies have examined mothers' feelings about their postpartum bodies. One study found that mothers try to deal with their postpartum body concerns and plan to reshape their bodies as they did before pregnancy (Hodgkinson et al., 2014). Another study found that motherhood helps mothers appreciate their bodies, but only if their bodies function well for maternal tasks, such as breastfeeding. Concerns about appearance still arise, especially when mothers must return to the workforce (Fox & Neiterman, 2015). A study assessed how postpartum mothers perceive their body image and found that mothers who feel their bodies deviate significantly from the ideal tend to experience anxiety and body dissatisfaction (Grajek et al., 2022). Another study explored objectification during motherhood, where mothers place excessive value on their appearance, resulting in negative consequences like body shame and concerns about a negative impact on breastfeeding, which comes from greater appearance concerns in mothers, and self-objectification by mothers themselves (Beech et al., 2020). Meanwhile, a study evaluated the consequences of maternal postpartum depression that ultimately shows a relationship between maternal postpartum depression and the mothering role. The study highlighted the importance of early treatment for maternal postpartum depression to prevent harmful effects on mother-baby interaction (Slomian et al., 2019). Additionally, another study found that millennial mothers use Instagram social media to fulfill cognitive, affective, personal harmony, social, and entertainment needs (Nur Rochimah et al., 2020).

Some previous studies have focused on a psychological perspective in assessing the postpartum body image of mothers. This study differs from previous studies by examining body image from a communication perspective. In this study, the meaning of body image is studied as a form of communication that arises from an intrapersonal process and is manifested as social behavior (Seibel, 2019). Researchers will analyze the process of communication events, specifically intrapersonal communication within young first-time mothers, to understand how they construct the meaning of their postpartum body image in the digital era. Communication plays a role in creating this phenomenon for young first-time mothers because it influences how society and individuals perceive postpartum body image. This happens through interactions between mothers and their social environment, where mothers construct the meaning of postpartum body image based on their interactions across various dimensions of their social lives. These dimensions include face-to-face interactions with others, consumption of social media posts, and receipt of comments or personal messages. All these interactions are internalized by mothers and shape their perception of reality in their minds (Fatimah et al., 2019).

Intrapersonal communication takes many forms: some unspoken, some spoken, some anticipatory, some retroactive, some compassionate, and some critical. The theory of symbolic interactionism has three foundations: (1) individuals respond to things based on personally interpreted meanings; (2) these interpretations develop from social interactions with others; (3) these interpretations can also be personal self-meanings (Ilham et al., 2023).

Body image is constructed through various spectrums of thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. It plays a key role in how mothers evaluate their physical appearance and their attitudes toward their bodies (Grajek et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the meaning of postpartum body image is an important research topic that can give insight into better plans to support mothers in achieving postpartum body acceptance.

The objective of this research is to understand how intrapersonal communication within digital-age mothers constructs the meaning

of postpartum body image. By understanding the diversity and personal nature of mother's construction of their postpartum body image, this study aims to inspire postpartum mothers to feel relatable and seen, ultimately motivating them to appreciate, accept, and love their maternal bodies. In addition, the study seeks to broaden mothers' insights into the definition of beauty, emphasize the importance of having a positive personality, provide knowledge about smart strategies to utilize social media for their own well-being, and delve into the performance of maternal body functions. Furthermore, the researchers hope that the findings of the study can encourage mothers to effectively adapt to their maternal roles by understanding positivity towards the meaning of postpartum body image. As an additional implication, the research aims to convey positive messages to new mothers in the digital era and contribute to the development of improved awareness and education strategies on body image acceptance for institutions, organizations, and communities in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses the constructivist paradigm with qualitative methods. Constructivism is a paradigm that emphasizes research involving in-depth observation of social action occurring in society. According to this paradigm, social science is studied significantly through close and in-depth observations of social actors who create, preserve, or manage social reality (Ilham et al., 2023).

The object of the study is postpartum body image in the digital era. The research subjects were eight new mothers who had experienced childbirth a maximum of two years ago, were from the late millennial generation and early generation Z, lived in the Jabodetabek area, and had actively used Instagram for at least the last five years. Table 1 below elaborates on the demographic and identities of these eight new mothers who willingly participated and shared their personal experiences for the sake of the research. This research was conducted from October to December 2023. These criteria were determined since one in four women over the age of 18 are mothers on Instagram. This emphasizes that mothers from the millennials

Table 1 Informants Profile

Informant	Age (year)	Postpartum Period (months)	Title	Domicile
RH	31	23	Film Publicist	Depok
YP	26	4	Freelance Content Writer	Jakarta
ET	30	24	Publishing Manager	Jakarta
HJ	28	24	Dentist Professional Program Student	Bekasi
AK	30	9	At-home Mom	Jakarta
MA	32	23	Design Entrepreneur	Bekasi
VR	30	20	General Practitioner	Tangerang
NO	29	6	Senior Data Analyst	Bogor

Source: Researchers, 2023

and Generation Z play an important role in managing their lives as mothers in the digital age. Today's moms are more connected than those of previous generations (Team, 2016). Instagram often offers a refuge for moms to enjoy inspiring and entertaining content related to mom-body positivity and motherhood. With Instagram's focus on real-life moments, much of the content about motherhood can address issues that mothers experience in the real world, such as postpartum body image, as examined in this study.

A phenomenological study design was chosen for this research. Phenomenology operates on the assumption that people interpret their experiences and try to understand the world based on their personal experiences. Phenomenology attempts to understand how a person constructs meaning and concepts from their understanding of the world (Ilham et al., 2023). Creswell's phenomenological idea, "A Data Collection Circle" was used to guide the data collection process of this study. According to Creswell, the requirements for good informants in phenomenological studies are individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Nasir et al., 2023). Therefore, eight mothers with the criteria mentioned in the previous section were selected by the researchers based on their experiences and their ability to communicate their experiences and perspectives on the topic of postpartum body image in the digital era (Table 1).

The concept of body image is examined through the theory of symbolic interactionism

within the scope of intrapersonal communication. Body image is conceptualized as a person's appreciation, love, and respect for their body. Other important aspects are a broad insight into the definition of beauty, a positive personality, media exposure, and a view of the performance of bodily functions (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). In intrapersonal communication, there are three foundations of symbolic interactionism theory: (1) individuals respond to things based on personally interpreted meanings; (2) these interpretations develop from social interactions with others; (3) these interpretations can also be modified by personal self-meanings (Ilham et al., 2023).

Data collection was carried out as a systematic procedure to obtain the necessary data. The data collection technique in this study uses several sources and methods. Information was obtained from primary sources in the form of subjects in this study, and indirectly from secondary sources such as literature reviews from previous studies relevant to the object of this research. The stages carried out in this research include interviews and observations (Ilham et al., 2023). Interviews were conducted with eight informants who had been selected based on the criteria for mothers explained previously as research subjects. The selected informants were considered the most familiar with the social situation or objects in this study (Hidayat, 2021).

The data analysis technique includes four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. Qualitative

data analysis also begins after data collection, starting with data reduction based on the results of interviews and observations. In the data presentation stage, researchers selected the statements needed for this research to make it easier to understand the events studied (Ilham et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When mothers go through the postnatal phase, they experience intrapersonal communication events in perceiving their postpartum body image. From the results of in-depth interviews with eight informants, along with the perspective of a phenomenological approach, researchers found a variety of very personal and unique spectrums of meaning for mothers in assessing postpartum body image. Some mothers love their maternal bodies, some despise them but later accept them, some are proud of their mom-body performance, and some are even afraid to meet other people because of their drastic physical changes. However, there is one thing that all eight informants agree on their body is no longer the body of a girl; it is the body of a mother. The ideal image of a girl's body will not be possible to re-achieve for women who have experienced pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Some are fine with it, while others experience difficulties on their journey of body acceptance.

How mothers interpret whether their postpartum body image is positive or negative depends on the intrapersonal communication events that occur. The reality in the field, as obtained by researchers using a phenomenological study design, supports the description of the theory of Symbolic Interactionism, which states that mothers respond to their body image consciously through reflective thinking. Based on their personal way of interpreting the results of interactions with their husband, biological mothers, mothers-in-law, fellow mothers, and motherhood content on Instagram, mothers internalize the meaning of their postpartum body image in various manifestations of their behavior in the social sphere (Ilham et al., 2023). This corresponds

to the symbolic interactionism theory of the society concept, where society has a role in creating one's thoughts and self-concept. Mothers reflect on how others respond to them, and they internalize this feedback individually (Risti et al., 2022).

One manifestation of the results of intrapersonal communication events in mothers in interpreting their postpartum body image is self-appreciation of their maternal body. For example, some mothers hire massage services as a gift of relaxation for their bodies after the hard work of labor. One informant mentioned that she did this because of a Chinese Javanese tradition that requires a body massage after giving birth, although she was only able to do it six months postpartum when she felt she had enough time for herself. Taking care of herself, such as applying a scrub every week for one month, was also done by an informant as a form of appreciation for her body. Although she did not have time to leave the house during the early postpartum period, for this mother, bathing could be a relaxing time for herself. By using a body scrub, she could restore her skin color that had changed due to hormones from the nine-month pregnancy period. Another way mothers show appreciation for themselves is by daring to wear fashionable clothes, even if they are at home all day, and abandoning the idea that women, after becoming mothers, do not need to dress up. Instead, she dresses herself up because she sees herself as beautiful in her own way, which provides a simple mood booster to go about her motherly duties comfortably.

Self-appreciation can also take the form of words that strengthen a mother's mentality. For example, some informants recognized the strength of their bodies in dealing with pain. Some mothers praise their body's high pain tolerance as they experienced no discomfort during childbirth and the subsequent recovery period at home, which usually takes longer than vaginal delivery (Setiaputri & Rumondang, 2022). Others recognize how strong their bodies are. One informant said:

All the women in my neighborhood – my mom, my sister, my mother-in-law – had cesarean birth. I initially wanted to experience the pain of natural childbirth. You could say that my body is petite, smaller than most women. Normally, if

there was heavy activity, I would say, ah, I'm small, I won't be strong. But when I gave birth, I changed my mindset, I kept eating and walking with intention. Until finally I was able to give birth normally.

The manifestation of words that strengthen the mother's mentality is also implemented in the form of not criticizing oneself. An informant mentioned that refraining from self-criticism is a more fundamental way of appreciating the body, which makes her mentally more stable after giving birth because stability is crucial for mothers to carry out maternal duties effectively. According to her, babies need a mentally and physically healthy mother to take care of them. This statement aligns with a popular article that demonstrates how physical and mental support from a mother's closest circle plays a key role in ensuring the mother's postnatal well-being, therefore it helps her embrace her new role as a mother to her baby (Mecadinisa, 2023).

Self-praise also occurred when mothers reviewed their body's performance in carrying out their maternal duties. Most informants mentioned that mothers were proud of their body's performance in breastfeeding. There were stories of mothers who managed to breastfeed for up to two years, and some continued despite living around women who had chosen not to breastfeed their babies. There were also stories of mothers who juggled housework while caring for their babies, even though they had not eaten, were sleep-deprived, and had undergone major cesarean sections.

However, some informants admitted that they felt less grateful for their bodies. They believed they should appreciate their bodies more by providing them with the nutrition they need. There was also a mother who regretted that she felt guilty when she allowed her body to rest. She believed she had to complete all household chores, which resulted in burnout for her body and mentality. The fact is that a mother's journey through the postpartum phase, particularly up to the two-year breastfeeding period, is a physically and mentally challenging expedition. During the postpartum recovery phase, mothers must undertake new maternal tasks such as breastfeeding their newborns while recovering their strength for daily activities after delivery. In addition to needing moments of rest

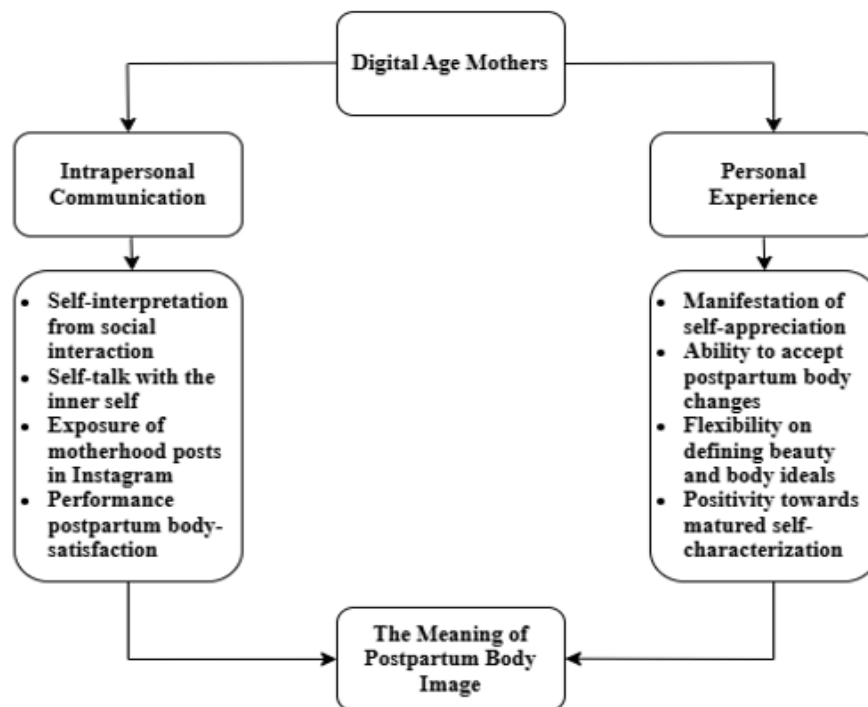
and space to focus on motherhood, mothers also need time to digest all the life changes they have experienced (Salsabila, 2022). In addition, a few informants admitted dissatisfaction with their maternal performance because they could not breastfeed their babies directly and had to exclusively pump breast milk.

With a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with bodily functions, mothers experience an impact on how much they can love their bodies after giving birth. There were a few informants who initially loved their bodies but later struggled to accept the changes experienced. Some mothers felt proud of the baby bump remaining on their stomachs at the beginning of the postpartum period because it symbolized the strength of their bodies in bringing babies into the world. However, they later found it difficult to accept the changes their body underwent, including weight gain during breastfeeding and worsening skin conditions. During breastfeeding, some skincare products cannot be used to avoid chemical contamination in breast milk (Wahyu & Orami, 2020).

There were also a few informants who initially found it difficult to accept body changes but later came to love their bodies. During breastfeeding, weight gain becomes more uncontrollable, and medical recommendations suggest that mothers should not randomly diet because it can disturb breast milk nutrition (Herliafifah & Upahita, 2021). Some informants admitted that they once felt so insecure that they were reluctant to meet others because they were embarrassed by their expanding body shape. However, the ability of their bodies to produce large amounts of breast milk helped calm their thoughts about their body image after giving birth. Additionally, positive affirmations from their husbands, who consistently said that they were beautiful, helped them accept the changes in their bodies after one year of giving birth and even gave them the courage to meet others.

However, some mothers can instantly love their postpartum bodies complete with all the changes. One informant said:

When I was pregnant, I was really fat, but this didn't mentally disappoint me. I felt sexy when I was pregnant; it was my golden moment as a woman. Then, after giving birth, Allah blessed me with abundant breast milk, so I naturally became thin. I



Source: Researchers, 2023

Figure 1 Model of Postpartum Body Image Research Results

was amazed that my body could change so drastically from being a girl to being pregnant and giving birth. My body went through a lot. I can love my body with all its changes.

Some mothers are also able to accept their weight gain after pregnancy and childbirth because they now have reached the ideal weight according to their height. Some mothers feel natural and comfortable with body changes ranging from sagging stomachs and blackened skin color to sagging breasts because they understand that all these changes aim to promote the baby's health through the breast milk their body produces.

The ability of mothers who instantly love their postpartum bodies aligns with a study that found the role of body image interventions in reducing the risks of depression during the postpartum period. The study found that mothers with body image concerns tend to associate unwanted weight gain with the development of depressive symptoms. Conversely, mothers with a positive body image before or during pregnancy find it easier to navigate the early postpartum period and accept bodily changes

compared to those with body image concerns during the transition to motherhood (Han et al., 2016). This indicates that women should be encouraged to have a positive body image before choosing to become pregnant or to become mothers. This preparation can help mothers avoid significant stress when adapting to the changes in their postpartum bodies.

Loving the postpartum body involves intrapersonal communication events within the mother, as illustrated in Figure 1, which describes how the meaning of postpartum body image is constructed. The mother's self often generates both compliments and criticisms. Researchers found that most mothers can balance self-talk, but a few tend to dwell on criticizing themselves. A mother can become very critical of her body if every time she looks in the mirror, she sees a fat, dull-skinned mother who is unable to produce abundant breast milk like other mothers. One informant said:

I think I hate my body too much. I should be more grateful for my body. But I always look at it negatively and ask, "How come I'm like this?" Every time I look in the mirror, I'm upset to see my chubby cheeks and a fat body. I feel ugly.

In contrast, a mother can praise her body if, when she looks in the mirror, the image she sees is a scar from a cesarean section that reminds her that her great body has endured a lot, or the appearance of sagging breasts because she successfully breastfed the baby according to her expectations. There is a balance that mothers can draw from both criticism and praise of the body. Mothers can tell themselves not to criticize so much because their bodies are already tired from caring for babies and instead be grateful for the good things that happen to their bodies after giving birth. Even though the reflection in the mirror is of a fat mother with a belly full of stretch marks, she can give thanks to her body when she sees her baby sleep soundly at night thanks to all her efforts in caring for him throughout the day.

The self-talk concept of body assessment tends to impact how mothers interpret the meaning of other people's remarks about their bodies during social interactions. Mothers who criticize themselves too often may become more disappointed with their bodies if, for example, they interact with other mothers who can express a lot of milk. They may become disappointed with their body's suboptimal performance in breastfeeding. Mothers can also feel hurt by social interactions with a mother-in-law compares her experience in caring for babies with today's mothers. They may also feel hurt by a brother who tells them they are fat, causing them to feel stressed and lose their appetite. However, with the help of positive affirmations from their husband and biological mother, they can regain their composure and get back into the spirit of motherhood. Meanwhile, mothers who can balance criticism and praise in their self-talk tend not to take other people's comments to heart. Although repeatedly told they are fat by extended family members or commented on by their biological mother that they could not take care of their body's beauty after giving birth, they can remain self-aware and accept their body condition without feeling hurt and disappointed. One informant also shared her story:

It was predominantly women who commented on my physique. They called me spotty and fat and said my nipples were black. My mom even fussed about the fact that her daughter, who used to be

perfect, now couldn't even take care of her body during childbirth. I was angry, but I accepted their criticism. I thought this was how my body is now. I'm not disappointed in myself. I accept it.

As mothers in the digital age, they can find encouragement to love their postpartum bodies through Instagram. Most mothers revealed that content about body changes in mothers, as well as positive messages about a mother's body, can make them feel not alone because there are stories of other mothers who experience the same difficulties. Mothers are also relieved that now many women are brave enough to post their real bodies on social media. By openly displaying the flaws or realities of a woman's body on Instagram, it encourages mothers to accept their postpartum arms, thighs, and belly. Some mothers are encouraged to ask their husbands for money to buy skincare products to improve their body flaws because there is an influential mother figure on Instagram who voices that a mother deserves to take care of herself and feel beautiful.

However, like a double-edged knife, there are also a few moms who choose to shut themselves off from the content or accounts of celebrity moms and influential moms on Instagram because they end up comparing their bodies with the figures they see on social media. This finding aligns with a study that explored the relationship between Instagram usage and body image concerns for women. The study found that fitpiration images from celebrities on Instagram were associated with greater body image concerns. This relationship was mediated by internalization and appearance comparison tendency, which resulted in negative appearance-related concerns and beliefs for women (Fardouly et al., 2018). Therefore, a strong foundation of the mother's self-concept is needed so that she knows well about her strengths and uniqueness, so that she can carry out her bodily changes comfortably.

With the dynamics of mothers accepting postpartum body changes, a new definition of beauty emerged, interpreted by mothers. Most informants mentioned that being a 'mother' is beautiful and reflects on their biological mothers who have made many sacrifices for them from childhood until now. After a woman

becomes a mother, she can define herself as more beautiful thanks to being given the gift of being able to conceive and give birth, which gives the feeling that the mother can be a true woman. Even with the change in body shape, a mother can define her motherly body as beautiful. Similarly, when a mother manages to take good care of her baby, she feels that her beauty is radiated through the process of caring for her baby. She can also see that the beauty of other mothers is also radiated because now she can see the power of 'superwoman' within mothers. For mothers, beauty is not always defined by physical appearance, but rather by their intelligence, patience, personality, and resilience in carrying out activities and taking care of the baby despite being 'battered' (e.g. lack of sleep, physical fatigue, body aches).

This aligns with a study exploring how Danish first-time mothers feel about their bodily changes within the first year after giving birth. Mothers talked about bodily activities they could perform at an individual functional level, strengthened by the feeling of being stronger than ever before. This narrative of strength through motherhood proves that mothers feel complete and proud of their ability to navigate life with their babies even without an instruction manual (Prinds et al., 2020).

Researchers found that after giving birth, mothers' flexibility in assessing the ideal body image also changed. Most mothers have a flexible view in interpreting body image since becoming mothers. In the past, when they were single, they believed in certain standards for an ideal body, such as white and smooth skin, luminous black hair, full breast size, and slim body shape (Sulaiman, 2021). However, since giving birth, they now see that these standards no longer define the ideal woman's body. For example, mothers realize that different breast sizes function equally well in breastfeeding their babies. They realize that breast size and shape are no longer criteria for an ideal sexy body. Mothers also realize that achieving a perfect body according to societal norms requires a support system involving space, money, and energy for self-care and exercise. Yet, postpartum mothers often face limitations in self-care and exercise, leading them to disregard societal ideals of the perfect body. They can accept their sagging stomachs and non-slim body shapes, patiently

waiting until they can prioritize intense exercise after completing the breastfeeding duties. Even mothers who easily love their postpartum bodies will stand up for other mothers whose bodies are criticized by others. They understand that societal pressure around ideal body issues can stress mothers, so they are unafraid to morally support and defend other mothers struggling to accept their body image.

In this study, mothers experience changes in interpreting postpartum body image positively and negatively, influenced by their closest circle such as husbands, biological parents, other mothers, and their brothers, as well as symbols like mom-body positivity content on Instagram. These findings aligns with a study that claims that mothers reflect on both their sensory perception and emotional responses to understand their postpartum body image. Mothers contemplate their normative responses to themselves and how body ideals are constructed within individual, societal, and political contexts (Prinds et al., 2020). Hence, some mothers can accept all flaws and understand that a mother's body and beauty are defined by their own perceptions and the perceptions of others.

The process of meaning construction occurs in mothers who have a positive image of the postpartum body. Despite initial difficulties, the mother can accept and love her body through an inner voice that voices gratitude, pride, and appreciation for her body. She is satisfied with the performance of her maternal body, gets moral encouragement from the mom-body positivity movement on Instagram, and also benefits from positive affirmation from her closest circle. Additionally, she has the opportunity to improve her diet and lifestyle so that her body becomes naturally healthier. This is in line with the theory of symbolic interactionism, which provides an understanding that individuals construct meaning through an interpretive process within themselves during communication. The theory also provides an understanding of the development of an individual's self-concept through interactions with others and the meanings and symbols that enable individuals to act (Dwianna et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that intrapersonal communication experiences shape the meaning of a mother's postpartum body image. Aligned with the theory of Symbolic Interactionism, these events have various forms, from self-talk with an inner voice that voices either positive or negative perspectives on body image, to interactions with husbands, families, fellow mothers, and engagement with postpartum body content on Instagram. Through personal experiences as well as intrapersonal communication events, mothers create their own understanding of postpartum body image. More deeply, these experiences lead them to interpretations of the definition of womanly beauty and ultimately help them in accepting and loving their maternal bodies.

The findings of this study also indicate that mothers are the key to family happiness. If the mother is unhappy, the baby will also be unhappy. Therefore, to create a healthy family, mothers need to prioritize their own health. They need support from a healthy environment to construct a positive image of their postpartum body with minimal stress.

This research makes theoretical and practical contributions to the topic of postpartum body image. The researchers suggested that women preparing for motherhood, as well as those who are already mothers, be educated and encouraged to prioritize self-love, especially during the vulnerable postpartum transition. Education on postpartum body positivity is also important for husbands, parents, in-laws, and siblings of mothers to support positive role modeling and acceptance of postpartum bodies.

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