

The Psychology of Manicures: Why Women Get Their Nails Done and How It Affects Self-Esteem

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Abstract

This article analyzes the psychological foundations of the manicure as a self-support ritual and a form of self-affirmation. The relevance of the study is driven by the sustained demand for nail services during periods of crisis and their influence on emotional regulation. The novelty lies in the analytical synthesis of data on manicures, makeup, and cultural-symbolic body codes with a focus on "body extension." The work describes the effects of manicures on mood, relaxation, and vitalization; it examines the differences between salon and independent practices, color coding, the influence of communication with the technician, the sanitary foundations of trust, and the boundaries between care and compulsion. Special attention is paid to salon communication as a condition for enhancing positive experiences. The objective of the work is to identify how manicures influence self-esteem and social behavior. To achieve this, comparative analysis, interpretive generalization of empirical data, content analysis of regulations, and theoretical modeling are employed. Publications and studies on makeup and female grooming practices are examined. The conclusion describes an applied framework for conscious decision-making for clients and technicians. The article will be useful to psychologists, nail service specialists, and researchers of female grooming.

Keywords: manicure, self-esteem, self-support ritual, body extension, color code, salon communication, sanitary safety, standardization, compulsive habits, psychological effects.

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Introduction

The relevance of this topic is confirmed by the persistent preservation of manicures in consumer priorities even during budgetary constraints: nail care supports a sense of control over one's image, stabilizes mood, and facilitates self-presentation in business and personal spheres. The theoretical perspective of the "extended body" interprets nails as a significant carrier of identity; a cultural-archetypal lens refines the symbolism of color

and shape [2]. Empirical data on salon and home practices record differences in emotional response [5], while regulatory requirements provide the basis for trust and anxiety reduction [3; 4].

The goal is to reveal the mechanisms of the manicure's influence on self-esteem and psychological state. Objectives:

- describe the emotional effects and differences between salon/independent procedures, correlating them with the "body extension" model;
- analyze the connection of color and design with confidence and social behavior in business and dating contexts;
- assess the contribution of salon communication and the sanitary-regulatory environment to the experience of safety, and delineate the boundaries between care and compulsion.

The novelty lies in integrating psychological, regulatory, and cultural-symbolic lines into a unified applied framework for conscious manicure practice.

Materials and Methods

The following works were used as research materials: A.A. Polovinkina [4] describes the standards of nail services (GOST R 58091-2018; GOST R 59455-2021) and the requirements of TR CU 009/2011 for product safety, which are used to reconstruct the "sanitary foundation" of trust. A.V. Slesareva, A.D. Fatykhova, D.V. Starosta, and F.B. Gibadullina [3] examine the risks of aggressive solvents, over-filing, and violations of instrument processing cycles; they provide the sequence: disinfection → pre-sterilization cleaning → drying → sterilization → storage. V.N. Zhukov [2] outlines the Jungian scheme of the collective unconscious and archetypes, allowing for the interpretation of color and design as symbolic markers of the "Self-image". A. Kawakubo and T. Oguchi [5] show the rise in positive emotions, relaxation, and vitalization after a manicure, as well as the superiority of the salon procedure over the home one and the influence of the depth of self-disclosure in conversation with the technician. A.A. Atanesyan [1] analyzes psychology and communication in the salon, describing techniques for managing expectations and empathetic skills. E.S. Lax et al. [6] reveal the experience of female self-care during the COVID-19 period, which helps interpret the manicure as a stable support ritual. M.C. Veçoso et al. [7] show a reduction in depressive symptoms against the background of cosmetic interventions, confirming the influence of aesthetic practices on affective states. N.

Wolf [8] critiques cultural beauty standards; this perspective is used to separate conscious choice from obsession.

Methods include comparative analysis of empirical data and regulations; content analysis of publications; interpretive synthesis relying on the Jungian model of symbols; and elements of theoretical modeling of the self-support ritual.

Results

For the modern woman, the manicure has become an integral part of life. In working definitions, nail service is interpreted as a set of procedures that establish not only hygiene and protection of the nail plate but also personal expressiveness, which in the research task translates into the plane of self-presentation and emotional self-regulation [4]. The issue of sustained demand during periods of economic turbulence is explained by the fact that a regular manicure acts as a self-support ritual: a woman allocates fixed time for contact with the bodily "self," receives a predictable result, and gains a sense of control over her appearance—a set of effects that reduces background stress and supports self-esteem. In this logic, the manicure is intended not only for nail care but also for self-expression.

A synthesis of empirical signals from the psychology of cosmetic practices points to three consistent psycho-emotional results of a manicure: an increase in positive emotions, relaxation, and vitalization. In a cross-sectional survey of Japanese participants, results showed that nail care positively affects three aspects: positive emotions, relaxation, and revitalization. Additionally, a difference between the salon procedure and self-application was revealed: people who use the services of salon nail technicians experience a more positive effect and relaxation [5]. In Table 1, $F(1,332)$ represents Fisher's F-criterion: the first degree of freedom relates to the intergroup effect (2 groups → $df=1$), the second to the residual variance ($df=332$); $p<0.01$ indicates a low probability of random divergence in positive emotions and relaxation, while there is no significance for vitalization.

Table 1 – Salon and Independent Manicure: Comparative Psychological Effects [5]

Indicator	Direction of Effect (Salon vs. Independent)	Status of Differences	Statistics (Univariate Analysis)
Positive Emotions	Higher in salon procedure	$p < 0.01$	$F(1,332) = 17.73; \eta^2 = 0.05$
Relaxation	Higher in salon procedure	$p < 0.01$	$F(1,332) = 11.11; \eta^2 = 0.03$
Vitalization	Comparable levels	n.s.	$F(1,332) = 1.11$

Note: Multivariate group effect: Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.93; F(3,330) = 8.86; p < 0.01; \eta^2 = 0.08$

Partial $\eta^2=0.05-0.03$ is interpreted as a medium effect size for applied psychology; the multivariate check yields Wilks' $\Lambda=0.93$ with $F(3,330)=8.86$ and $\eta^2=0.08$, which falls into the medium range of effect strengths. This gap is interpreted functionally: the salon format adds a social component of care, and the immediately visible fingertips provide constant feedback throughout the day, requiring no mirror (unlike facial makeup), which enhances the "body extension" effect—the inclusion of nails in the "Self-image" scheme as a permanent marker of presence and boundaries. This mechanism aligns with analytical psychology, which asserts that the human psyche, according to Jung, represents a kind of pyramid: its apex is consciousness, the base is the collective unconscious, and the layer between them is the personal unconscious [2]. From this perspective, painted nails work as a behavioral anchor connecting sensory corporeality, cultural codes, and current self-presentation goals.

Color choices modify behavioral scenarios. Red encodes energy, attention-seeking, and demonstrativeness; nude choices reinforce a reading of "naturalness" and reliability. An archetypal approach explains the demand

for red as a symbol of life force and passion, and nude as a symbol of "one's own" and a safe field of communication [2]. In a business environment, saturated shades transmit a dominant impulse and readiness for active interaction; nude facilitates passing through social "filters" in conservative contexts. On dates, bright choices amplify signaling about sexual attractiveness, while calm one's signal care and stability; the choice transforms into a tool for situational self-assertion while maintaining internal consistency with the self-image.

Communication with the technician strengthens or weakens the expected psycho-emotional output. The structural equation model in the salon group shows that superficial self-disclosure (hobbies and daily life) is associated with positive emotions, relaxation, and revitalization, whereas deep confessions about traumatic experiences and "negative personality" correlate with a decrease in the positive effect [5]. Table 2 presents standardized path coefficients β : positive values for everyday topics are linked to an increase in indicators, negative values for confessional topics to a decline; roughly 0.10/0.30/0.50 correspond to small/medium/large levels.

Table 2 – Depth of Self-Disclosure in Salon and Subjective Effects of Manicure [5]

Level of Self-Disclosure (Niwa & Maruno, level scale)	Association with "Positive Emotions"	Association with "Relaxation"	Association with "Vitalization"
I. Hobbies and daily life	$\beta = 0.24; p < 0.01$ (positive)	$\beta = 0.19; p < 0.05$ (positive)	$\beta = 0.23; p < 0.01$ (positive)
II. Difficult experiences	n.s.	n.s.	$\beta = -0.15; p < 0.05$ (negative)
III. Flaws and weaknesses	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
IV. Negative traits and abilities	$\beta = -0.25; p < 0.01$ (negative)	n.s.	n.s.

Note: Model fit: $\chi^2 = 17.22; df = 9; CFI = 0.988; RMSEA = 0.074; SRMR = 0.030$.

The model fit is sufficient: CFI=0.988 (>0.95), RMSEA=0.074 (<0.08), SRMR=0.030 (<0.08); such parameters support the interpretation of the obtained β . Hence, a practical rule follows for the "mini-psychologist" technician: empathy, active listening, and light supportive conversation increase the subjective benefit of the procedure, while immersion in painful topics shifts the focus from bodily care to the experience of vulnerability and depletes the restoration resource. The balance between warmth and boundaries increases the chances for sustainable "ritual" effectiveness without replacing psychotherapy.

Hygiene and safety act as a systemic condition for trust, without which the manicure ceases to function as a means of strengthening self-esteem. The regulatory architecture is described through GOST R 58091-2018 and GOST R 59455-2021 for nail services, as well as through TR CU 009/2011 for cosmetic products; adherence to sterilization procedures, ventilation requirements, and waste disposal supports the client's sense of security and reduces anxiety, which enhances relaxation and positive affect (see Table 3) [4].

Table 3 – Regulatory Supports, Sanitary Chain, and Psychological Safety of Service [3; 4]

Service Component	Regulatory/Procedural Support	Psychological Effect on Client	Risks of Violation
Materials and coatings	TR CU 009/2011 "On the safety of perfumery and cosmetic products"; purchasing certified agents	Sense of security; reduction of anxiety	Drying of skin and nails, allergic reactions to aggressive solvents and poor-quality compositions
Premises and environment	Requirements for ventilation, water supply, sewage; environmental friendliness of processes (per standard descriptions)	Trust in the place; readiness for repeat visits	Accumulation of odors, discomfort, irritation of respiratory tracts
Instrument processing	Full cycle: disinfection → pre-sterilization cleaning → drying → sterilization (dry heat) → storage	Predictability of result; relaxation during procedure	Bacterial and fungal infections during cycle failures; client anxiety
Waste handling	Collection and removal by specialized organizations with licenses	Perception of system and order	Sanitary violations; decrease in trust
Coating removal technique	Gentle protocols (preserving ~5% of coating during removal to protect the plate and prevent over-filing)	Absence of fear for nail condition	Thinning and delamination due to aggressive filing
Technician's working conditions	Personal protective equipment (PPE), dust minimization, rational workplace organization	Indirect client confidence through observed safety culture	Risk of allergies, muscle strain, dust inhalation in absence of PPE

A manicure without coating is not harmful to the body. Risks increase with aggressive solvents, over-filing, violation of sanitary regulations, and poor-quality materials; therefore, a component of conscious choice regarding the technician and salon is integrated into the self-esteem narrative [3]. The professional routine of instrument processing establishes a foundation for both

the client and the technician. The main stages of processing manicure tools are: disinfection, pre-sterilization cleaning, drying, sterilization, and storage [3]. Standardization and environmental requirements form result predictability, increase loyalty, and create a sense of control, which resonates with the goals of emotional self-regulation [4].

The repeatability of the procedure defines a fine line between self-care and compulsion. Markers of shifting into obsession include disproportionate anxiety over a chip, frequent unscheduled visits due to "imperfection," and ignoring signals of damage to the nail plate and skin. In the interpretation of analytical psychology, such a strategy resembles a compensatory move where an external object takes on the function of maintaining internal equilibrium; when the measure is lost, compensation loses plasticity and leads to a narrowing of the behavioral repertoire [2]. A conscious regimen (choosing coatings considering the condition of the nail plate, preserving 5% of the old coating during removal to protect against over-filing, individual dust protection for the technician) keeps the ritual in the zone of health rather than dependency [3].

Social plots manifest in two typical fields—business and dating. In business meetings, well-groomed hands increase the sense of professional competence in the woman herself and facilitate initial contact: nails are read as a "micro-signal" of discipline and self-organization. In romantic encounters, the manicure is integrated into an attractiveness strategy and becomes a channel for transmitting a personal code—from a minimalist hint at intimacy to playful boldness in design. In both fields, the same psychological gain is recorded: a raised subjective "bar" of confidence strengthens behavioral activity and readiness to engage in interaction, which aligns with the total matrix of "positive emotions / relaxation / revitalization" [5].

Finally, the artistic-symbolic reading supports the thesis of "body extension." Archetypal ideas relate to the indestructible foundations of the human spirit [2], so the color, shape, and shine on the fingertips work not as an accidental detail, but as a compact carrier of symbols anchoring the desired image in everyday reality. The shift from internal experience to external sign and back creates a feedback loop where well-groomed nails support the "voice" of identity, and identity supports the choice of aesthetics and care regimen. Such a cycle explains why, even with budget contractions, women continue to visit the salon: the subjective gain in mood and control over the self-image outweighs the costs, with the salon experience providing a more pronounced uplift than the independent one [5]. The overall picture records five interconnected conclusion-indicators:

a) the manicure performs the function of ritual self-support and a stable marker of the "Self-image";

b) the salon procedure surpasses the home one in effects on positive affect and relaxation, while vitalization depends on individual attitudes;

c) superficial self-disclosure in dialogue with the technician increases subjective benefit, while deep confessions reduce it;

d) adherence to standards and sanitary chains strengthens the sense of safety and supports the target emotional output;

e) the balance between aesthetic care and boundaries prevents sliding into compulsion, preserving the manicure as a tool of identity and confidence, rather than a source of vulnerability.

Conclusion

The manicure supports the triad of "positive emotions — relaxation — vitalization," with the salon format providing a higher uplift in positive affect and relaxation due to the social component and stable result. Nails function as an "extension of the body": color and shine fix the desired image, while archetypal symbolism is read in everyday interactions; red enhances demonstrativeness and attention attraction, while nude strengthens the sense of reliability. Salon conversation is effective in a mode of light self-disclosure; deepened confessions reduce the positive effect of the procedure; recommendations for communication align with practices of empathetic service. Service standards and material safety form a sense of security and reduce anxiety; adherence to the full instrument processing cycle and gentle coating removal techniques supports trust and prevents damage. The balance between care and compulsion is achieved through the conscious choice of color and procedure frequency, consideration of nail condition, transparent sanitary practices, and clear communication boundaries; this framework increases confidence and strengthens self-esteem without reducing care to rigid dependency.

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