



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

ASHLEY BERARD

BA (Thompson Rivers University, 2014)

“Post Your Journey: Analyzing the Formation of an Instagram Support Group for those Living with Fibromyalgia”

Department of Sociology

Thursday, December 15, 2016

11:00AM

Cornett Building

Room A317

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. André Smith, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Steve Garlick, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Denise Cloutier, Department of Geography, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Brianna Turner, Department of Psychology, UVic

Abstract

Fibromyalgia is a chronic illness characterized by debilitating symptoms such as unpredictable widespread pain, fatigue and migraines. Social support can be a crucial factor in illness management for individuals living with this medically contested, stigmatized and marginalized illness. This study seeks to uncover the ways in which new forms of support communities for fibromyalgia are developed and maintained on the social media platform Instagram. For many, social media is a significant aspect of their daily reality and in this social space, new forms of relationships and communities have begun to form. A mixed-method research design incorporating both a content and semiotic analysis of Instagram posts as well as interviews with participants utilizing the app was conducted to shed light on the ways in which the relatively new phenomenon of sharing illness experience and support occur on Instagram.