



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

**Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

of

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MSc (University of Victoria, 2013)
BSc (University of Toronto, 2008)

“Self-Esteem and the Relation between Arousal and Relationship-Initiation Motivation”

Department of Psychology

Wednesday, December 7, 2016
2:00PM
David Turpin Building
Room A136

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Danu Stinson, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Louise Chim, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Ryan Rhodes, School of Public Health & Social Policy, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Susan Boon, Department of Psychology, University of Calgary

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Wanda Hurren, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, UVic

Abstract

Both physiological and emotional arousal can increase romantic attraction towards a desirable potential partner. Such attraction reflects *relationship-initiation motivation*, a connection motivation directed at a new partner, because attraction increases the drive to pursue a social interaction or relationship with another person. Therefore, arousal appears to influence the *need to belong*, the inherent motivation for positive social interactions. A large body of research also reveals that self-esteem influences people's pursuit of belongingness, especially during relationship initiation. Yet the literature linking arousal and attraction and the research linking self-esteem and attraction have never been connected. The present research shows that self-esteem moderates how arousal influences relationship-initiation motivation.

To examine the moderating effect of self-esteem on the relation between arousal and relationship-initiation motivation, I conducted three studies. Study 1 involved manipulating women's physiological arousal in an anticipated social interaction. Results showed that arousal directly increased relationship-initiation motivation for higher self-esteem individuals (HSEs) but not lower self-esteem individuals (LSEs). Study 2 replicated Study 1 with men, showing that arousal increased relationship-initiation motivation for HSEs but not LSEs, but in this case, the effect wholly depended on men applying a positive emotional label to their arousal. Study 3 involved manipulating both men's and women's arousal in an imagined social interaction. For women, arousal directly decreased HSEs' but increased LSEs' relationship-initiation motivation, the opposite result to Study 1. For men, arousal directly increased HSEs' but decreased LSEs' relationship-initiation motivation, replicating the results of Study 2.

My package of studies connects self-esteem and arousal research, unifying two formerly separate subject areas. These findings provide an underlying mechanism (i.e., arousal) that explains how social risk interacts with self-esteem to influence relationship-initiation motivation. Consequently, my research increases the breadth and depth of current self-esteem theories.