



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

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

of

SARAH WARDER

BEd (University of Victoria, 2015)
BA (University of Victoria, 2011)

**“It’s like “Strong is the New Skinny,” but you can’t be too strong’:
Negotiating and decoding the healthy and fit female body online”**

Interdisciplinary Studies

Monday, March 26th, 2018
1:30 p.m.
MacLaurin Building
Room A341

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Janni Aragon, Department of Political Science, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Annalee Lepp, Department of Gender Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Jaigris Hodson, Interdisciplinary Studies, Royal Roads University

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Kieka Mynhardt, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, UVic

Abstract

Research has explored the increasing muscularity of male bodies in popular media, the cultural ideal of masculinity, and its effect on body dissatisfaction in young men, but similar research with young women nearly always focuses on “thinness as the cultural ideal for femininity” (Eisenberg, Wall, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2012). This study addresses the lack of research exploring the increasing muscularity of female bodies in popular media and explores the depiction of the healthy and fit female body via health and fitness content on social media platforms. In particular, it discusses this particular bodily presentation’s potential to play a bigger part in body satisfaction, body image concerns, and the cultural ideal of femininity today than it has previously.

This study examines a group of young women’s (ages 17-22) perceptions of health and fitness media online via five focus groups and one interview. This research was conducted to explore their understandings and interpretations of health and fitness content on social media, with particular attention to the representation of the healthy and fit body on Instagram. The data reveal how the girls negotiated, and often critiqued, the limited representation of the concepts of health and of fitness. In spite of some of the affordances of social media, in particular the ability for users to contribute content that might challenge traditional and/or stereotypical media representations, numerous constraints appear to normalize a particular body that is deemed healthy and/or fit. It would appear that certain bodies (are allowed to) perform health and fitness in specific ways and these representations have implications that relate to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and consumption.