



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

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

of

MacKENZIE ROBERTSON

BA Hons. (Simon Fraser University, 2015)

**“Dieting Also Starves Romantic Relationships:
The Association between Dieting and Romantic Relationship Quality”**

Department of Psychology

Thursday, August 15, 2019
10:00 A.M.
Cornett Building
Room A228

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Danu Stinson, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Marsha Runtz, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Margaret Penning, Department of Sociology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Simon Devereaux, Department of History, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

The negative health consequences of dieting for individuals are well established. Yet little is known about the interpersonal consequences of dieting for romantic couples. This study utilized self-report questionnaire data from undergraduate students ($N = 221$) and their romantic partners ($N = 74$) to examine whether dieting is associated with romantic relationship processes. I hypothesized that dieting engagement would indirectly predict worse relationship outcomes. Body dissatisfaction is a core dimension of self-esteem, and people with low self-esteem often project their self-doubts onto their partner. Because dieting is strongly associated with body dissatisfaction, I hypothesized that people who engaged in more extreme dieting would project their negative self-evaluations of their bodies onto their partners, resulting in negative evaluations of their romantic partner's attractiveness. Moreover, I expected that negative partner evaluations would predict worse relationship outcomes for both partners. As hypothesized, participants who engaged in more dieting (e.g., restricting food intake, feeling guilty after eating, compensatory behaviors) experienced higher body dissatisfaction, which predicted more negative evaluations of their romantic partner's physical attractiveness. In turn, finding their partner less attractive predicted more negative evaluations of their partner's worth, increased conflict, and lower commitment to their relationship. Moreover, romantic partners who were rated as less attractive accurately perceived participants' negative evaluations of their attractiveness, and experienced lower self-esteem. However, participant dieting did not predict relationship outcomes for their romantic partners. Overall, results indicate that dieting is negatively associated with both individual and interpersonal well-being. Findings must be replicated in longitudinal research, but highlight the potential for the negative consequences of dieting to extend beyond the individual to influence close relationship processes. This research also contradicts dominant models of dieting and close relationships that frame dieting in a positive light.