PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Department of Psychology

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2009 University of Victoria MSc
2007 University of New Brunswick BSc

The Trajectory of Alcohol Use in Emerging Adulthood:
Investigating the Roles of Alcohol Measurement and
Educational Pathways

Tuesday, October 29, 2013
9:30 AM
TEF, room 264

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Tim Stockwell, Department of Psychology, UVic
(Supervisor)
Dr. Bonnie Leadbeater, Department of Psychology, UVic
(Member)
Dr. Douglas Baer, Department of Sociology, UVic
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External Examiner:
Dr. Helene White, Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Raymond Siemens, Department of English, UVic
Abstract

Inconsistencies in alcohol use measurement across studies and broad conceptualizations of post-secondary education experiences of young adults impede the comparison of research findings and our understanding of age-related shifts in alcohol use during emerging adulthood. This dissertation uses data from the Victoria Health Youth Survey (V-HYS), a 5 wave longitudinal study following 662 Canadian youth across the ages of 12-27. Study 1 examined the longitudinal associations among four measures of alcohol consumption (frequency, quantity, frequency of heavy episodic drinking and volume) from ages 15-25 and compared the ability of these measures to predict alcohol-related problems in emerging adulthood. Levels and rates of change across alcohol dimensions were moderately associated over time. However, measures of alcohol involvement significantly differed in their average rate of growth and in the prediction of alcohol-related problems in emerging adulthood. Heavy episodic drinking and volume showed the strongest associations in developmental trends and had similar predictive validity of alcohol-related problems. The findings from this study support using measures of heavy episodic drinking or volume for assessing alcohol use and alcohol-related problems during emerging adulthood. Building on Study 1, Study 2 compared the trajectories of heavy episodic drinking during adolescence and emerging adulthood among youth in four different educational pathways: two-year college students, 4-year university students, transfer students and terminal high school graduates. This study also examined whether individual level factors mediated group differences in heavy drinking among the education groups. Terminal high school graduates consistently had the highest levels of alcohol use over time compared to all three post-secondary groups. Two-year college students had significantly higher levels of heavy drinking than university or transfer students when they enrolled, but university students had the greatest increases in heavy drinking after enrollment. However, differences in heavy drinking between post-secondary groups were completely accounted for by variations in the age at the time of enrollment. Taken together, the current findings illustrate that enrolling in post-secondary
education, regardless of the type of institution, is associated with an increase in the frequency of heavy drinking during emerging adulthood and that this increase is greatest for younger students. However, the rates of drinking never exceeded that of the terminal high school graduates over time. These studies illustrate that the conclusions drawn about alcohol use trends during emerging adulthood are highly contingent on the alcohol consumption measure used and conceptualizations of educational experiences. The results of the current studies provide recommendations to researchers about which measures of alcohol involvement to select for inclusion in future studies, and inform about the optimal timing, targets, and contexts for alcohol prevention and intervention efforts during emerging adulthood.

**Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships**

2010  CIHR Frederick Banting and Charles Best Canada Graduate Scholarship
2008  Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council – Masters Scholarship
2008  Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research – Trainee Award
2007  Pacific Century Graduate Scholarship, UVIC
2007  University of Victoria Graduate Award

**Presentations**


**Publications**


2. Leadbeater, B., **Thompson, K.,** Gruppuso, V (2012). Co-occurring Trajectories of Symptoms of Anxiety, Depression, and Oppositional Defiance from Adolescence to Young Adulthood. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology,* 0 (0), 1-12. DOI: 10.1080/15374416.2012.694608