



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

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

of

CASSANDRA LAURA SULLIVAN

BSc (University of Victoria, 2009)

**“The Association between the Timing of Sexual Debut and Young
Adult Romantic Relationships”**

Department of Psychology

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

1:30 P.M.

Cornett Building

Room A228

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Bonnie Leadbeater, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Stuart MacDonald, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Joan Martin, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Warwick Dobson, Department of Theatre, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This longitudinal study investigates whether the timing of sexual debut (early, on-time, or late, compared to one's peers) is directly associated with young adult romantic relationship experiences (i.e., overt and relational victimization, relational aggression, dating worries, and positive dating experiences) or indirectly associated through trajectories of individual factors (internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, and alcohol use). Participants were from a large, six-wave longitudinal study ($N = 662$, 48% males, M age at T1 = 15.5 years, $SD = 1.9$ years). I use multilevel models to estimate how the associations between sexual debut group, interpersonal factors, and young adult romantic relationship experiences. Gender differences are also investigated. First level analysis of the association between debut group and trajectories of individual factors show that early sexual debut (before age 15), is associated with higher baseline levels of alcohol use, internalizing symptoms, and externalizing symptoms. However, debut group was not associated with rates of change in individual factors over time. Second level analysis of the association of young adult relationship experiences with debut group and trajectories of individual factors show that early sexual debut and higher baseline levels of individual factors is associated with less positive dating experiences, more negative dating experiences, and more dating worries in young adulthood. Findings also show that individuals with steeper increases in internalizing symptoms and alcohol use from adolescents to young adulthood also report more negative dating experiences and dating worries. The results provide a better understanding of the longitudinal impacts of adolescent experiences on young adult relationship outcomes.