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**TESTING AND EXTENDING
SELF-CONTROL THEORY OF CRIME**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In Psychology at
Massey University**

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2007

**To Brian,
*You truly are my saviour in countless ways***

For Aimee and Adam

In Memory Of

**Brendan Paul Williams
1971 - 2005**

**Susan Kathleen Gough (née Counsell)
1965 - 2007**

ABSTRACT

Self-control theory of crime has had considerable impact on mainstream criminology since it was first published in 1990 by Gottfredson and Hirschi. It is regarded as the most parsimonious criminological theory currently available and has been empirically tested across diverse populations and behaviours. Considerable empirical evidence supports the generality of self-control in predicting crime and analogous behaviours, with low self-control ranked as one of the strongest risk factors for crime. Of substantive concern however is a lack of explanatory power in the theory, a problem that besets criminological theorising in general. This study attempted to integrate self-control theory with theory of planned behaviour (TPB). Whilst self-control provides a stable-dispositional explanation for propensity to crime, TPB is interested in the decision-making processes related to involvement in crime. As such, the study examined the relationship between time-stable self-control and the mediating role of situational-specific factors in the causation of crime. The purpose of the study is twofold. Firstly to investigate the underlying mechanism by which a person with low self-control may have greater propensity to crime and secondly to increase the explanatory value of self-control theory.

Three disparate groups were used to explore the single theories and the integrated theory; female students, male students, and prison inmates. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling were conducted to examine the sufficiency of the theories to explain intention to commit crime across three groups. Low self-control was unable to explain behavioural intentions for students but was successful in explaining intentions to do crime in a prison population. The motivational elements of TPB, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control, were shown to exert considerable influence on intention to do crime across the three samples but not attitude. The integrated theory increased the explanatory value of self-control theory for prison inmates over and above its constituent theories. These findings were not replicated with male and female students, raising questions about the generality of self-control

theory. Implications for self-control theory are discussed, especially the need to include significant others and behavioural control variables in understanding the causes of crime.

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