Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MSc (University of Victoria, 2009)
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“Paved with Good Environmental Intentions: Reconsidering the Theory of Planned Behaviour”

Department of Psychology

Thursday, July 16, 2015
9:00AM
David Turpin Building
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Robert Gifford, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Stuart MacDonald, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Graham Brown, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Sebastian Bamberg, Department of Social Work, University of Applied Science Bielefeld

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Bruce Wallace, School of Social Work, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The theory of planned behaviour proposes that behaviour is predicted by behavioural intention which is, in turn, predicted by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms regarding the behaviour and perceived control over the behaviour. Implied within this theory is that each of the three base components (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) influences intentions. However, despite being one of the most widely used theories in social psychology, few studies have investigated this basic premise. In addition, research on cognitive dissonance, public commitment, confirmation bias, implemental mindset, and the false consensus effect suggest that there may be a reverse-causal influence of intentions back on the base components of the theory. This potential reverse-causal sequence was tested in three studies. The first was correlational, the second was a lab-based experiment, and the third was a quasi-experimental field study. Study 1 employed a cross-lagged correlation design and showed that a reciprocal relation between intentions and base components was plausible. For the behaviour of supporting an environmental organization, Study 1 showed that attitudes were likely to influence intention-setting and that intention-setting subsequently influenced subjective norms. Study 2 employed a modified version of a free choice paradigm in which participants chose to set an intention to support one of two environmental organizations (using different support behaviours). Consequently participants rated the base components for the chosen organization higher and the rejected organization lower. However, this effect was primarily observed if participants were not initially committed to supporting an organization before the study began. Study 3 was a field study in which chemistry lab users who were exposed to an intervention that targeted behavioural intentions subsequently perceived more positive subjective norms (one aspect of subjective norms was changed). Together, the three studies demonstrate that a reverse-causal relation between intentions and base components is plausible and, thus, the theory of planned behaviour should be modified to include a reciprocal relation between these constructs. Intentions are most likely to influence base components that are least relevant to actual behaviour. When attitudes, subjective norms or perceived behavioural control are associated with actual behaviour, the one that is most strongly associated is least likely to change in response to setting an intention to engage in that behaviour. Other, less relevant, base components are more likely to change.