SUMMARY

In recent years, citizens have increasingly become more responsible for safety in the public domain, for example through neighborhood watch programs and WhatsApp groups. Although these initiatives have garnered academic interest, little attention is paid to the interaction between the three possible parties that will undoubtedly converge in this public domain: target, offender and guardian. In this PhD thesis, the last two are examined in more detail using routine activity theory.

Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical framework and various relevant insights from the literature. This chapter further highlights gaps in existing guardianship research, as well as limitations associated with different methods of data collection. Based on the abovementioned,

the main research question is defined as: *what is active guardianship, who exercises it and how does it affect offender behavior?*

The aims of this thesis are threefold:

1) address gaps in recent work on the definition of guardianship;
2) examine the differences between active and inactive guardians;
3) explore innovative ways to examine active guardianship practices in relation to offender behavior.

The second chapter includes an extensive literature review of empirical studies that have used divergent definitions to measure guardianship. Who can practice guardianship and how can this diffuse concept be made measurable? Suitable methods and definitions for future research are explored. The results show that the addition of “active guardianship” based on observations is the most adequate and robust: this definition remains closest to the original theory, includes active dimensions of guardianship and is demonstrably replicable in different circumstances.

Following the above, Chapter 3 elaborates on active guardianship with a quantitative survey of active and inactive guardians. A representative sample of the Dutch population (4,800 respondents) was questioned about their
experiences with guardianship in the event of disorder and crime in their own neighborhood. The two research questions that are answered in this chapter are: what are the individual differences between guardians who do or do not intervene? And, which individual characteristics explain the intervention by active guardians? The results show that several characteristics are predictive of intervention by guardians: age, degree of urbanization, safety training and extraversion.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on exploring an experimental method to accurately measure guardianship under realistic circumstances, rather than based on estimates or self-reporting. The fourth chapter provides insight into the use of experiments in social sciences through a literature study, and further expands the theoretical framework. An important finding is the lack of experiments on the effect on offender behavior. Chapter 5 aims to close the aforementioned gap through two experiments: the first experiment manipulates the number of guardians present during a theft; the second experiment manipulates the level of activity of guardians present during a theft. The results show that so-called “thieves” are slower in both conditions, and more afraid of being caught by guardians who do pay attention to their surroundings. Remarkably, the degree of success and the number of canceled attempts are not higher in conditions where this was expected: 80 percent of the subjects were able to steal the item. Many also devised a strategy or well thought out excuses in case they were addressed by others. Finally, a large proportion of the participants counted more guardians than were present, while underreporting in the experiment where numerous guardians were used. This finding could indicate that from the offender’s perspective, an attentive guardian makes more of an impression than many inattentive guardians.

In short, this thesis has furthered guardianship research through the innovative use of experimental designs; by providing insight into individual characteristics of active and inactive offenders; and by linking a perpetrator perspective to the theoretical framework. Finally, this PhD thesis also identified policy implications as well as new avenues for future research into guardianship.