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Introduction
1.1 Introduction

Every successive generation faces its own challenges in making the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and the generation who have grown up and reached adulthood in the 21st century, the millennial generation, is no different. They are faced with a myriad of choices and opportunities (Côté, 2000). This is reflected in the increasingly heterogeneous nature of the early adult years (Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Rindfuss, 1991); the pathways to adulthood are now many and varied. What it means to be an adult, to have achieved adulthood, is accordingly different for recent generations than for previous generations. Today’s millennials see being adult as accepting responsibility for the self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent, rather than being married, having children, and settling down (Arnett, 2007). All these changes have led to the development of a theory and body of research examining emerging adulthood. But why might a criminologist be interested in changes in the nature of the early adult years and what being adult means to people?

The well-known age-crime curve demonstrates that criminal behaviour peaks around late adolescence and early adulthood before gradually decreasing over the subsequent adult years (Farrington, Loeber, & Jolliffe, 2008). Young adults are thus overrepresented in the crime statistics compared to older adults. In the Netherlands 2.5 percent of 18 to 25 year olds are registered by the police as offenders, compared to 1.1 percent in the total population (CBS, 2015). This peak in offending is mainly a consequence of an increased number of offenders, rather than a small number of offenders offending at a much higher rate (Farrington, Loeber, & Jolliffe, 2008; Sweeten, Piquero, & Steinberg, 2013). The period referred to as emerging adulthood therefore has two characteristics: a peak in offending followed by a sharp about turn in the prevalence of offending. From increasing numbers during adolescence, the numbers start to decrease during the early adult years and beyond: Most offenders desist during emerging adulthood (Averdijk, Elffers, & Ruiter, 2012). As well as a decrease in criminal prevalence during this period of life, it is also a period of dramatic change in other life domains. For example, in the Netherlands 88 percent of 18 year olds live with their parents, whilst by age 27 just 27 percent still live in the parental home (CBS, 2015). Understanding the many changes that are going on in the lives of young people as the decrease in criminal prevalence takes place is therefore crucial to understanding this decrease in criminal prevalence. Furthermore, understanding why the majority of young people leave...
behind their criminal proclivities of adolescence can help us recognise and support those who have more difficulty in turning away from criminal behaviour as they enter adulthood.

The central aim of this thesis is to provide a picture of how features specific to the lives of emerging adults affect their propensity to offend, or, rather, their likelihood to desist from offending. In doing so it draws on a number of life-course criminological theories of desistance, testing their relevance and explanatory power in the face of the changes in the nature of young adulthood seen in recent years. In this thesis, after outlining the nature of emerging adulthood in the Netherlands and describing risk factors for delinquent behaviour in Dutch emerging adults, a number of the key features of emerging adulthood are explored in relation to delinquent behaviour. In order to do so, two datasets from general population samples of Dutch emerging adults are employed. Both contain self-report data on delinquency, as well as a range of other data, measuring changes in the lives of emerging adults.

1.2 Theoretical background

1.2.1 Emerging adulthood
The theory of emerging adulthood was first introduced around the turn of the 21st century by Jeffrey Arnett, a developmental psychologist (2000). He proposed that as a result of major demographic and cultural shifts a new developmental period in the life course had emerged, sandwiched between the end of adolescence at eighteen years and the start of young adulthood in the late twenties. Arnett built on and expanded developmental stages suggested in the work of pioneering developmental psychologists, such as Erikson (1968), Levinson (1978), and Keniston (1971). He argued that rather than representing a brief transitional period, this time of life was now distinct enough to warrant its own theory. Over the years that have followed a substantial and interdisciplinary body of work has been built up examining the emerging adulthood period, often from a developmental perspective. Despite this, there are those who argue against emerging adulthood as being a theory or a distinct developmental stage. After outlining Arnett’s and others’ conceptualization of emerging adulthood, I will briefly address these critics of emerging adulthood in terms of their relevance to this thesis.

Arnett describes emerging adulthood as arising due primarily to the increasingly delayed transition into traditional adult roles of marriage, parenthood, and a stable employment (2015). In the western and developed world, societal and cultural changes, such as the emancipation of women and the post-industrialisation of the labour market, have meant that more young people spend at least some of
their adult years in further education. Yet, even for those that do not, progressing straight from compulsory, secondary education into a secure job for life, settling down with a partner and starting a family, is a far more unusual life path today than it was for, say, the baby boomer generation. In the Netherlands completing at least one internship, paid or unpaid, is also common at all levels of education. It is now not unusual to switch jobs frequently or to have a portfolio career (Dawood, 2014). Cohabitation prior to or instead of marriage is often a feature of emerging adults’ lives. Parenthood also happens on average at older ages. What these changes mean is that now, demographically speaking, there is no normal. Trajectories into adulthood have become increasingly heterogeneous. Likely as a consequence of these demographic changes, the early adult years have taken on a distinct subjective nature.

Arnett (2012; 2015), studying young adults in the USA, concluded that emerging adulthood is a time of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities. These are referred to as the five key features of emerging adulthood. Young people are free to explore and experiment with different education, employment, and relationship possibilities, finding out who they want to be in life. These explorations can make for an unstable time, but instability can also arise due to the precarious financial situation and future many emerging adults face (Silva, 2016). ‘Boomerang kids’ has become a popular term in the media to describe one manifestation of instability: when young people return to live in the parental home after a period of independence (e.g., Chevreau, 2011; Marsh, 2016; Pennington, 2015; Sussman, 2015; Talty, 2015). Unlike in adolescence, when obligations to parents are high and education is compulsory, or in young adulthood when responsibilities towards spouses, employers, and offspring become more established, during emerging adulthood young people are able to focus on themselves. Arnett argues this is an important step on the road to learning self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, emerging adulthood remains a period of feeling in-between, and adult in some ways, but not others (Arnett, 2001; Lowe, Dillon, Rhodes, & Zwiebach, 2012). The subjective assertion of not yet feeling entirely adult is supported by research demonstrating that at age 18 young people have not yet actually reached their cognitive capacity (Cohen et al., 2016). Cognitive performance, such as self-control, is still developing into their twenties, so indeed: biologically adult in some ways but not others. Emerging adults also view this as a time of possibilities. With all still to play for, emerging adults are generally optimistic about life (Arnett, 2007). These five features of emerging adulthood have been found to be relevant in different samples across the USA (Lisha et al., 2012), but also across Europe (Douglass, 2007; Fadjukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2007; Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007; Macek, Bejcek, & Vanickova, 2007; Negru, 2012), South and Central America (Facio, Resett, Micocci, & Mistrorigo, 2007; Fierro Arias & Moreno
Hernandez, 2007; Pérez, Cumsille, & Martínez, 2008), and the Middle East and Asia (Atak & Çok, 2008; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). The argument, therefore, for the universality of emerging adulthood, at least in the developed world, appears, on the basis of these studies, to be strong. Given that emerging adults do not yet feel fully adult and that they increasingly delay transitioning into roles traditionally seen as markers of adulthood, what indicators do they use or value when determining whether adulthood has been reached?

The study of adulthood within developmental psychology is a relatively recent phenomenon (Côté, 2000). It is therefore difficult to make comparisons between this generation and previous generations on what constitutes being an adult. Nevertheless, we know that emerging adults today rate ‘individualistic qualities of character’ (Arnett, 2000, p.472) as important signs that adulthood has been achieved: accepting responsibility for the self, making independent decisions, becoming financially independent, as well as, for example, having a more equal relationship with parents. Far less importance is placed on demographic transitions, such as finishing education, getting married, or becoming a parent. In fact, emerging adults often view these more traditional or permanent adult roles as a sign of deterioration, a sign of lost youth, and, therefore, situations to be put off for as long as possible (Arnett, 2015; Côté, 2000). The question is whether the five key features of emerging adulthood, the range of research that has attempted to demonstrate universality, and the fact that adulthood appears to have a new and different meaning, amounts to emerging adulthood representing a developmental stage requiring its own theory. There are those who argue it does not.

Furstenberg (2016) argues that whilst emerging adulthood is useful as a conceptual framework, it does not amount to a theory, is largely descriptive, and does not adequately represent differences between the social classes. Bynner (2005), similarly, agrees with Arnett’s argument that the nature of the early adult years has changed considerably, not only in the USA, but also in Europe. However, where he differs is in the role of individual agency. He argues that structural factors continue to play a crucial role, particularly in limiting the options of the ‘have nots’, the most disadvantaged in society. Silva (2012) points out that, rather than exploring and experimenting, working class emerging adults are bouncing along from one precarious position to the next, often lacking support from social institutions. This point is particularly relevant for this thesis given that the most disadvantaged in society are most at risk of involvement in criminal behaviour (Loeber, 1990). Whilst Arnett’s vision of emerging adulthood as a time of exploration and experimentation may be true for many, it is clear that not all sections of society experience the same opportunities. Exclusion from higher education or the labour market, in particular, limits young people’s ability to exercise agency over their lives, and may hinder their chances of turning away from or resisting criminal behaviour. Other critics of
emerging adulthood take issue with the whole concept of an ‘emerging’ adulthood, rather than just its generalizability.

Hendry and Kloep (2007) argue that the prolonged transition to adulthood is nothing new, something backed up by historian Steven Mintz in his book on adulthood, *The Prime of Life* (2015). He argues that the swift transition into adult roles that the post-war generations experienced was, historically speaking, more of an anomaly than today’s protracted transition. Except for this brief post-war period, the twenties have generally been viewed as an unsettled, anxious, and uncertain time of life. For example, in the 19th century the average age of marriage in the USA was 26 years, a source of particular anxiety for women as remaining unmarried meant economic and legal instability (Grinspan, 2013). There are critics, however, that go further. Some argue that the idea of emerging adulthood implies that at some point adulthood is achieved and thus views the adult as a finished product (Côté, 2000; Hendry & Kloep, 2002). This ignores the continued development that occurs throughout the lifespan. Silva (2013) reflects something similar to this in her work on disadvantaged emerging adults: the instability they experience is not restricted to emerging adulthood, but an indication of a chronic state of uncertainty that continues into their later adult years. In terms of criminal behaviour, whilst the age-crime curve shows the sharpest decrease during emerging adulthood, the curve does not drop to zero, but continues its downward trajectory throughout the adult years, reflecting this idea of change and development continuing throughout adulthood.

Another important point raised by critics is whether emerging adulthood is good for society (Hendry & Kloep, 2007b). Arnett (2007) does agree with this point, whilst at the same time recognising the benefits of increasing participation in post-secondary education. Increasing numbers of young people experiencing a prolonged moratorium, an extended period in which to explore and not make firm commitments to societal institutions, represents a waste of resources and increasing the possibility that they will ‘fail to launch’. This criticism is also pertinent to this thesis. If young people are taking longer to grow up the trends of criminal behaviour in the early years of adulthood, i.e., the peak we see in the age-crime curve, may extend further into the adult years. This trend is actually reflected in recent crime statistics from Scotland, showing that the peak age of offending has shifted from late adolescence to emerging adulthood, specifically age 22 (Matthews, 2014). In the Netherlands, whilst juvenile crime is falling, the crime drop among young adults is not as obvious (van der Laan & Goudriaan, 2016). The delaying of adulthood, therefore, whether a new phenomenon, the result of personal choice, or of structural disadvantages, has the potential for negative consequences on delinquent behaviour.
It is clear that, despite criticisms, what these researchers all agree on is that the nature of the early adult years has been and is different for recent generations compared to their parents’ or grandparents’ generations. On average emerging adults enter traditional or stable adult roles at later ages than their parents’ generation, if at all. Many affluent, western emerging adults have the opportunity to explore and experiment, to focus on themselves, freedoms not available in adolescence and freedoms usually curtailed by entering stable adult roles. Disadvantaged emerging adults are more likely to experience this time as one of instability and of an uncertain future. It is important to take these factors into account when examining theories of crime, and when evaluating previous empirical work on desistance from delinquent behaviour, as this thesis aims to do. Macro level changes in society create differences between generations, like those outlined, that should not be ignored: The historical context in which people develop needs to be taken into account when considering theories of crime (Sampson, 2016). Young people are coming of age today in a time of high youth unemployment following the financial crash of 2008, during the age of the internet and the ‘new’ cybercrimes that have arisen as a result, but equally at a time when crime is at historically low levels (CBS, 2016). Whilst in this thesis I do not address differences between birth cohorts, I do consider the peculiarities of young people’s lives today and how they might affect or be relevant to their delinquent behaviour as they become adult.

1.2.2. Life-course criminological theories
Traditionally criminologists have busied themselves with explaining why some individuals offend and others do not (Farrington, 2003). However, over recent decades, with the growth of life-course criminology, examining individual patterns in onset, continuation, and desistance from crime has become increasingly prominent. This growth has been enabled by an increasing number of longitudinal, often prospective, datasets collected and used to test the life-course criminological theories (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2010; Liberman, 2008). Theories that explain individuals’ criminal behaviour can be classified into three types: static, dynamic, and typological (Raymond Paternoster, Dean, Piquero, Mazerolle, & Brame, 1997). Static theories, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime (1990), argue that individual differences in criminal or antisocial tendencies are due to a stable underlying criminal propensity, in their case, low self-control. In contrast, dynamic theories argue that criminal behaviour is state dependent, i.e., criminal or antisocial behaviour is affected by the context in which the individual finds themselves. Dynamic theories thus allow for the effect of social circumstances to result in behavioural continuity, as well as to instigate behavioural change. Lastly, typological theories combine static and dynamic theories, arguing that different types of offenders are the result of different causal processes, some static some
more dynamic. The main aim of this thesis is to address changes in, and particularly desistance from, delinquent behaviour due to changing life circumstances during emerging adulthood. As such it focuses on dynamic theories and the dynamic aspects of typological theories.

One of the most prominent dynamic theories of crime is that of Sampson and Laub. Sampson and Laub outline their age-graded theory of informal social control in their two landmark books, *Crime in the Making* (1993) and *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives* (2003), as well as in a number of empirical papers, in which they re-examine and update data from Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck’s study *Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency* (1950). This theory posits that changes in local life circumstances instigate changes in criminal behaviour. Specifically, getting married, entering the military, finding a job, or becoming a parent can act as a turning point, providing the informal social control needed to help offenders desist from criminal behaviour. When they commit to these adult social roles, offenders have more to lose from offending, and the possibility of getting caught, than they do to gain, hence they desist. The desistance effect of adult social roles is argued to be indiscriminate, i.e., their effect is the same for everyone. However, Laub and Sampson (2001) do recognise that some people are less likely to be ‘exposed’ to adult social roles. The cumulative effect of disadvantage is such that continued involvement in criminal activities increasingly cuts offenders off from conventional society and decreases the likelihood that adult social roles will be available. Nevertheless, despite this qualification, the gradual decline in criminal behaviour seen in the age-crime curve is, they would argue, testament to the increasing number of individuals entering adult social roles as they age.

The question is whether, with the delay in entering adult social roles evident among more recent generations of young people, we see a shift in this decline in criminal behaviour to later adult years. Evidence appears to suggest this is happening (Matthews, 2014; van der Laan & Goudriaan, 2016). More pertinent to this thesis, with the decrease in importance placed on ‘traditional’ adult social roles among emerging adults, do these roles still exert informal social control on individuals and as such lead to desistance? Sampson and Laub point to the desistance effect of *stable* and *committed* bonds to society. In an increasingly dynamic and unstable labour market, in a society where marriage is becoming less common and divorce more so, do adult roles represent the stability and commitment, particularly during emerging adulthood, that this theory deems necessary for behaviour change? Or is this stability and commitment to society now fulfilled by other, ‘alternative’ adult roles?

Stability and commitment to adult roles, and the social control that follows, is according to the theory of cognitive transformation only the second part of the process underlying behaviour change (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). In this dynamic life-course theory, it is argued that prior to entering adult roles
offenders need to make a cognitive shift, before being able to make the most of transitioning into adult roles. In this theory, stability and commitment are therefore an indication that a prior cognitive shift has taken place. The mechanism behind the change is as much the cognitive shift as the informal social control. The authors of the theory highlight the importance of individual agency in transitioning into adult roles, particularly for more recent generations for whom entering adult roles is less likely to just ‘fall into place’ (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002, p. 993). This theory might be particularly relevant to emerging adults for whom a stable relationship and job is not always a goal, or if it is a goal, cannot be taken for granted.

Given the heterogeneity of trajectories during emerging adulthood, where demographically anything goes and nothing is expected, transitioning into adult roles that can aid or support desistance is not self-evident. As Mintz (2015, p. 79) points out “it is much harder to be an adult who determines her or his own path than to follow a culturally prescribed life course”. Consequently, making a cognitive shift may be more important for emerging adults than previous generations, a necessary step on the path to both adulthood and desistance. Furthermore, the emphasis emerging adults place on exploration and experimentation implies a more conscious decision making process in what roles are taken on. Consciously deciding to transition into a new role suggests an important move is being made and that jeopardizing this move through delinquent behaviour would be less likely. A prior cognitive shift may therefore be more necessary for emerging adults to desist, given the danger of drifting through the early adult years and ‘failing to launch’.

In contrast to the above two theories, Moffit’s dual taxonomy (1993), as the name suggests, argues that there are two theories of antisocial behaviour, one for life-course-persistent offenders and the other for adolescence-limited offenders. In this thesis, with its use of general population samples, we focus on the theory of adolescence-limited offenders. In contrast to the theory of life-course-persistent offending which is static, the adolescence-limited theory is dynamic. Moffitt argues that the environmental context peculiar to adolescents encourages the onset of offending. Specifically, young people experience a maturity gap during adolescence, whereby they feel adult but are not yet afforded the privileges, freedoms, or social status of adults. This motivates delinquent behaviour, as they mimic the behaviour of their life-course-persistent offending peers, who appear to have access to these privileges. However, as they enter adulthood, the environment changes and conventional adult social roles, and the accordant adult status, become available.

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1 Laub and Sampson (2003) do not discount the importance of agency (p. 146), although it plays a less prominent role in their theory.
Adolescence-limited offenders therefore exit the maturity gap and their motivation for delinquency wanes. Barring becoming ensnared in patterns of delinquent behaviour (McGee et al., 2015; Moffitt, 1993), desistance is therefore normative in adulthood for the adolescence-limited offender.

Similarly to the discussion above regarding the age-graded theory of informal social control, changes in the nature of the early adult years may have consequences for whether adolescence-limited offenders really do desist as they enter adulthood. If young people feel in-between adolescence and adulthood, if a fully adult social status is not yet accorded them, if the peer group continues to play a prominent role in their lives, does their motivation for delinquency still wane or does it remain present during the emerging adult years? It is also possible that that the changes that clearly do take place upon entering emerging adulthood, such as leaving compulsory education, developing a more equal relationship with parents, and having access to adult privileges, are enough to continue provide the impetus for desistance for adolescence-limited offenders. Evidence of a shift in the peak of the age-crime curve towards later ages suggests this is not the case. It is, however, an empirical question and one which this thesis hopes to begin to address.

The life-course theories discussed here are those which feature most prominently in the hypotheses tested in this thesis. There are of course others. For example, Osgood’s interpretation of the routine activities theory (Osgood, Wilson, O’Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996) and Warr’s interpretation of Sutherland’s theory differential association (Warr, 1998a), both of which point to the importance of changes in the peer group, and activities therein, being the driving force behind desistance upon transitioning into adulthood. These two theories place more importance on situational factors explaining behaviour change. Whilst they, therefore, provide plenty of scope for future research on the changing role of peers during emerging adulthood, this thesis focusses on processes of change related to the meaning of adulthood.

Within life-course criminology there are also theories of desistance which focus more the subjective processes involved in behaviour change. Maruna’s (2001) narrative approach emphasises the importance of agency and the development of redemption scripts amongst desisters. Paternoster and Bushway’s (2009) identity theory of desistance argues that individuals have several identities or selves. Once the costs of the offender identity begin to outweigh the benefits, as life failures add up, motivation to change the self as offender grows and desistance occurs. These theories were, however, developed with the serious or chronic offender in mind. They therefore are less relevant to a thesis which sets out to examine the more ‘normative’ desistance process, which occurs as young people mature into adulthood.
1.3 Prior studies and limitations

Within the field of life-course criminology an increasing number of studies using longitudinal, and often prospective, data have been carried out, which look at the desistance process during adulthood, often focussing on the effect of various adult roles on offending (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2010; Liberman, 2008). For both genders, the effect of marriage has been examined (Bersani, Laub, & Nieuwbeerta, 2009; Craig, 2014), the effect of employment has been examined (Uggen & Wakefield, 2008; van der Geest, Bijleveld, & Blokland, 2011), and the effect of parenthood has been examined (Giordano, Seffrin, Manning, & Longmore, 2011; Zoutewelle-Terovan & Skardhamar, 2016). These adult roles have variously been found to have a desistance effect in adulthood, often using samples of convicted adults or using convictions as a measure of offending. In this thesis, emerging adults specifically are the population of interest, as this is the period when the majority of young people desist from offending. As discussed, transitioning into ‘traditional’ or stable adult roles is less common amongst recent generations: Marriage and parenthood are being increasingly delayed, and stable employment is increasingly uncommon. Focussing on the changes in the lives of today’s emerging adults as they exit adolescence and enter emerging adulthood is therefore important when testing the continued relevance of life-course theories of desistance. Furthermore, in examining the ‘normative’ process of desistance in emerging adulthood, we need to widen our field of vision to include delinquency carried out by ‘regular’ young people, rather than concentrating on convicted samples. Self-report data removes some of the potential bias of judicial data (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000) and captures a broader range of offending and offenders. Much research on adolescent delinquency uses school-based samples and self-reports of antisocial behaviour to examine the well-documented onset of delinquency during this period. Matching this body of research to examine the other side of delinquent careers, desistance, by using general population samples and self-reports of offending, will add considerably to the literature on desistance processes.

There are some studies which have looked at progression into adult roles more relevant to the emerging adult period. In an early study, Horney, Osgood and Marshall (1995) looked at cohabitation as well as marriage, finding that the former did not have a desistance effect. However, Capaldi, Kim and Owen (2008) looking at all relationships, not just marriage, found that being in a stable relationship did aid desistance. Siennick and colleagues (2014), however, only found a desistance effect of cohabitation for couples intending to marry. The evidence seems to suggest, therefore, that cohabiting relationships that do not involve marriage may lead to desistance, but only if they represent stability. As to whether non-cohabiting romantic relationships, frequent in the emerging adult years, play a role in desistance, is unclear.
The role of employment in emerging adulthood has also been examined. Lustig and Liem (2010) using a general population sample and self-reported delinquency found employment to have no effect on offending. They hypothesized that the jobs young people take on are not meaningful enough to have a desistance effect. Uggen (2000), using a self-report measure of offending, found that employment only had a desistance effect from the age of 27 onwards, and therefore not in emerging adulthood. It seems, therefore, that employment alone does not seem to have a desistance effect during emerging adulthood.

It is possible that by examining adult roles in isolation the cumulative effect of becoming an adult across several domains, as often happens during the demographically dense emerging adult period (Rindfuss, 1991), is missed. A number of studies have addressed this concern. Doherty and Cwick (2016) find that life events, including graduating from high school and having a steady job, have a cumulative effect on desistance. Abeling-Judge (2016) similarly finds a cumulative effect of marriage and employment using a general population sample and a self-report measure of delinquency. Massoglia and Uggen (2011) also looked at more ‘traditional’ roles of marriage and parenthood, but in combination with self-sufficiency and completing school, finding that desistance was related to a ‘package’ of markers of adulthood. Kuhl and colleagues (2015) looked at a number of different roles, including cohabiting, employment and educational attainment, finding transitions into adult roles were related to desistance. Martin and colleagues (2014) find similar results: earlier exits into adult roles were related to earlier desistance. Two studies, using general population samples of emerging adults and self-reported delinquency, looked at how adult roles combine (Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005; Palmen, Hilverda, Blokland, & Meeus, 2014). Both find that those who were likely to have completed the fewest transitions into adult roles, i.e., were still at school, still living with parents, not in serious relationships or employment, were also more likely to report delinquent behaviour. It appears, therefore, that examining adult roles in combination may be a better approach to capturing the effect of becoming an adult, of moving out of adolescence and away from delinquency during emerging adulthood.

Besides transitioning into adult roles, a few studies have included alternative markers of adulthood, possibly more relevant to today’s emerging adults. Siennick (2011) looked at financial dependence on parents, finding it to be related to self-reported delinquent behaviour. One of the studies mentioned above looked at moving out of the parental home (Osgood et al., 2005) and another at self-sufficiency (Massoglia & Uggen, 2011). Kuhl and colleagues, (2015) included in their study residential mobility, particularly pertinent given the frequency with which emerging adults change residential status (Mitchell, 2006). Johnson and colleagues (2011), interested in the changing role that parents have during
emerging adulthood, found that parental support and monitoring continued to have a desistance effect. These studies point to the fruitfulness of examining whether alternative markers of adulthood have a desistance effect during emerging adulthood, as previously traditional adult roles have been found to have for older generations.

Based on this brief review of the literature, there is clearly scope for much more research in this area. Features of the social context during emerging adulthood, such as instability in employment, residential mobility, non-cohabiting relationships, as well as more subjective features, such as feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, are all areas that may play an important role in desistance or persistence during this period. In order to examine these and increase our understanding of desistance processes during emerging adulthood, research needs to be carried out on recent generations of young people. Each birth cohort comes of age under different societal conditions and norms. We should not therefore blindly assume that theories developed on cohorts born in the years following World War II also apply to more recent cohorts. We can then update theories to encompass, for example, different manifestations of informal social control.

1.3.1 This thesis
In this thesis, I attempt to fill gaps in the literature regarding delinquency and desistance during emerging adulthood. Firstly, by using contemporary samples I am able to examine the relevance of various life-course criminological theories of desistance to emerging adults, who have grown up and reached adulthood during the 21st century. Secondly, by using self-report data and general population samples I am able to examine processes of ‘normative’ desistance. In this I attempt to provide a counterbalance to the adolescent delinquency literature with its focus school-based samples, use of self-report data, and the ‘normative’ onset of offending that occurs in this age group.

1.4 Data
The data used in this thesis come from two contemporary, general population samples and use self-reported delinquency as a measure of offending behaviour, in order to overcome limitations in the literature described above. Five of the following empirical chapters make use of data from the Transitions in Amsterdam project (TransAM) carried out by the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). Chapter 5 uses data from the Conflict and Management of Relationships project (CONAMORE), carried out by researchers at Utrecht University, the Netherlands (Meeus, Akse, Branje, Ter Bogt, Crommelin, & Delsing,
The CONAMORE project has been running since 2001 and, so far, six waves of data collection have taken place. It thus provided the opportunity to examine outcomes for a contemporary cohort of older emerging adults and furthermore a cohort that has been followed since late adolescence. In this section of the dissertation, however, detailed information on the TransAM project and sample will be provided. As data from the CONAMORE project is only used in one chapter, and furthermore, has been used in many prior publications (Meeus, 2010; Meeus et al., 2006), details of this project are restricted to a more brief outline in Chapter 5.

1.4.1 The TransAM project
The TransAM project was set up in order to follow a representative sample of Dutch emerging adults residing in Amsterdam, the capital city of the Netherlands, over several years. To date this study has collected data from participants between 2010 and 2014. The main aim of the project was to advance knowledge about how factors pertinent to the transition to adulthood affect criminal behaviour, and vice versa, by collecting longitudinal data on the lives of contemporary emerging adults. Prospective data collection, using closely spaced measurement points, provides a reliable source of data for mapping the rapid changes that occur in young people’s lives during the early adult years. Ethical approval for carrying out the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law at VU University, Amsterdam (CERCO).

Procedure. Initially 3,408 potential participants aged 18, 19.5, and 21 years, were randomly selected from the municipal registry. Emerging adults with at least one police contact prior to their 17th birthday were oversampled, as were those with Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Caribbean ethnicities. They were first contacted by mail, before receiving a follow-up visit in person by a trained interviewer, where possible of a similar age and the same gender as the potential participant. Of the 3,408 initially contacted, 970 agreed to take part. For the first wave of interviews, participants were interviewed face to face either in their homes, at the VU University campus, or, under exceptional circumstances, in a public space such as a library or café. After a period of six months had elapsed participants were re-contacted via telephone or e-mail. A second shorter interview was carried out, the first section of which via telephone the second via an online questionnaire. Again, following another period of six months the third interview was carried out via telephone and an online questionnaire. The fourth interview was carried out following another six-month period. This interview was, as the first, longer and carried out face to face. For taking part in each interview participants received a €15 or €25 gift voucher to thank them for their time.

Sample. Descriptive demographic details of the sample at each interview wave are provided in Table 4.1. As can be seen, the project was successful in
recruiting equal numbers of males and females. The project was also successful in oversampling Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Caribbean participants. Based on data from the Amsterdam municipal registry these ethnicities make up 24 percent and 9 percent of the cohort, whereas in the TransAM sample they represent 43 and 19 percent respectively at wave one. These ethnicities were oversampled, firstly, because they are over represented in the crime statistics in the Netherlands (Blokland, Grimbergen, Bernasco, & Nieuwbeerta, 2010). This is true, however, for all ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. What is so interesting about the Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Caribbean groups is that it appears they follow different criminal career trajectories to the native Dutch (Jennissen, 2009). Based on cross-sectional data, Dutch Moroccans evidence a sharper decrease in offending during the early adult years than native Dutch. Dutch-Caribbean evidence a prolonged criminal career, with their offending levels not dropping until in their late thirties.

In order to capture enough offending, and thus be able to examine desistance from offending in this general population sample, young people with police contacts prior to age 17 years were oversampled. In the entire Amsterdam cohort 9 percent have a police contact, in the TransAM sample at wave one 18 percent have a police contact. We can therefore conclude that the project was successful in oversampling adolescent offenders. Participants who were recruited lived in 84 out of 89 possible neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and therefore a wide variety of neighbourhoods were represented in the dataset.

The data. As mentioned, four interview waves have been carried out, where the first and fourth were more in depth. As well detailing their delinquent behaviour throughout the previous six-month period, at each interview participants provided details of their romantic relationships, their education status, their employment status, and their living situation for each month of the previous six month period or since their last interview. At each interview participants also provided up-to-date details of: their financial situation, their offspring, their immediate social network, their routine activities, their substance use, and their victimization experiences. In this way the data is specifically designed to answer questions regarding how nuanced changes in local life circumstances relate to changes in delinquent behaviour, and vice versa. Furthermore, during the first and fourth interviews, and to a lesser extent the second and third interviews, a range of psychometric scales were completed. These included measures of self-control, aggression, identity, criminal attitudes, life satisfaction, and shame and guilt measures.

This thesis uses self-reported delinquency as its key outcome measure. Participants were given a list of 48 offences and asked to indicate how many of each they had committed in the previous six-month period, or since their last interview. This list included minor offences, such as vandalism or verbal abuse, traffic offences, such as riding a scooter under the influence or without a licence, as well
as more serious offences, such as possession of a weapon, arson, and burglary. The inclusion of minor and traffic offences was consciously made, in order to capture low-level offending that occurs within the general population. The project’s aims, to examine offending, and desistance therefrom, within the general population, are best answered using a wide definition of delinquency. Offences such as verbally abusing someone because of their sexual orientation or buying something that you know is stolen property may be minor in terms of consequences within the judicial system, but are nevertheless indicative of criminal propensity and norm beliefs, and therefore worthy of study. Furthermore, these more minor offences are often used in research on adolescent delinquency and antisocial behaviour, and therefore tracking changes in these, as well as more serious delinquency during the early adult years, provides crucial information on the aetiology of desistance from criminal behaviour.

This thesis also uses a broader definition of desistance than is often the case. Many researchers view desistance as a state of non-offending at which ex-offenders arrive (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003). This state of desistance is often seen as a dichotomy and measured as such. In this model of desistance, however, exactly whether ‘true desistance’ has been achieved can only be determined with absolute certainty upon death (Farrington & Wikström, 1993). Another view of desistance is as a developmental or dynamic process (Bushway et al., 2003; Kazemian, 2007). This model allows scope for examining gradual decreases in offending and it is particularly appropriate for looking at within-individual change over time. Furthermore, as this thesis does, using self-report data is also more suitable for examining a gradual process of ‘behavioural desistance’ rather than ‘official desistance’, which Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) point out is merely desistance in the eyes of the law, rather than the movement from committing crimes to not committing crimes. In this thesis, therefore, a decrease in self-reported offending is referred to as desistance, as it indicates a change in behaviour. Whether this pattern of behaviour change is intermittent or indicative of permanent change is of course open to discussion, a discussion that will be returned to at a later point.

1.5 Research questions and structure of the thesis

My aim in this thesis is to use longitudinal, prospective data on Dutch emerging adults to describe the nature and development of delinquent behaviour during the early adult years. A number of research questions are relevant. What does emerging adulthood look like in the Netherlands and which factors predict delinquency during this period? Does transitioning into adult roles relevant to emerging adults lead to desistance from delinquency during emerging adulthood, and if so what
are the mechanisms behind the desistance effect? Does reaching key markers of adulthood, as valued by emerging adults, lead to desistance from delinquency? Are the potentially negative features of emerging adulthood, such as instability, related to delinquency? Answers to these questions will be framed within the emerging adulthood and life-course criminological theories and literature in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 begins by providing a picture of emerging adulthood in the Netherlands. Arnett developed the theory of emerging adulthood in the USA, and much empirical work has been carried out on North American emerging adults (e.g., Benson & Furstenberg, 2007; Galambos, Turner, & Tilton-Weaver, 2005). In recent years the field has expanded greatly, with an increasing number of researchers studying European emerging adults, including in the Netherlands (e.g., Crocetti, Klimstra, Keijsers, Hale, & Meeus, 2009; Luyckx, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Berzonsky, 2007). Nevertheless, the applicability of the five key features of emerging adulthood has not yet been examined using a Dutch sample, something this chapter rectifies.

Having established that emerging adulthood is a relevant construct in the Dutch context, Chapter 3 focusses on risk factors for delinquent behaviour during this period. Risk factors for adolescent delinquency generally include delinquent peers (Asscher et al., 2013; Haynie and Osgood 2005; Weerman, Bernasco, Bruinsma, and Pauwels 2013), neighbourhood disadvantage (Elliott et al. 1996; Herrenkohl, Lee, and Hawkins 2012; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2003), aspects of parenting behaviour (Hoeve et al. 2009; Janssen et al., 2014), need for autonomy (Brezina 2008; Chen 2010; Galambos, Barker, and Tilton-Weaver 2003), and substance use (Assink et al. 2015). This chapter examines whether these factors are still relevant in emerging adulthood, given changes in the nature of these early adult years. This chapter looks at differences between individuals, with the longitudinal nature of the data used to predict delinquency measured during the fourth interview wave using risk factors measured during the first interview wave.

Chapters 4 and 5 both examine adult roles and their possible effect on desistance from delinquency. Using a quasi-experimental approach, Chapter 4 focusses on the desistance effect of spending time in adult roles relevant to today’s emerging adults. Taking inspiration from Moffitt’s theory of adolescence-limited offending and the maturity gap, it examines the possible moderating effect feelings of adulthood play in this relationship. Chapter 5 uses data from the CONAMORE project to examine the interplay of transitions into adult roles, personality development, and delinquency. It draws on the life-course criminological theories discussed in this introduction, testing their relevance for this general population sample of emerging adults.

Chapter 6 takes a person-centred approach to examine instability in role status during emerging adulthood and its relationship with delinquency. One of
the features of emerging adulthood that continues to cause consternation in the popular media is the notion of ‘boomerang kids’ (e.g., Chevreau, 2011; Marsh, 2016; Pennington, 2015; Sussman, 2015; Talty, 2015). In this chapter, we examine whether boomeranging back into dependent ‘adolescent-like’ roles from more independent ‘adult-like’ roles is a common phenomenon, whether it clusters across life domains, such as education and living situation, and whether it is related to delinquent behaviour.

Chapter 7 examines an alternative marker of adulthood, financial independence, and whether it has a desistance effect. In doing so, the relevance of life-course criminological theories regarding desistance and ‘traditional’ adult roles is tested and potentially updated. This chapter, as well as Chapters 4 and 5 look at within-individual changes over time and are therefore particularly able to test the causal nature of the theories, as differences between individuals, which may affect their propensity to move into adult roles or to become financially independent, as well as their propensity to offend, are controlled for.

Finally, Chapter 8 summarises and discusses the main findings of the thesis. An evaluation is provided of whether the research questions that were set out to be answered have indeed been addressed. Returning to focus on the theories outlined in this introduction, this chapter reflects on implications for these theories in the light of the findings, considers the practical implications of the findings, and suggests fruitful areas for future research.