

## **The Emerging Adulthood Gap: Integrating Emerging Adulthood into Life Course Criminology**

In 1993, clinical psychologist Terrie Moffitt presented a developmental theory that describes two key offending trajectories, the adolescent limited and life course persistent.<sup>1</sup> The adolescent limited trajectory group consists of individuals who mainly engage in lower-level crimes, such as underage drinking and shoplifting, and typically desist by approximately age eighteen. In the second group are individuals in the life-course persistent trajectory, who engage in antisocial behavior earlier in their life course, participate in both lower-level and more serious crimes, such as robberies and assault, as well as the lower-level offenses typical of adolescent limited offenders. These life course persistent offenders do not desist, but instead continue their involvement in offending through adulthood.

Key to Moffitt's work is the idea of the maturity gap, defined as the delay between biological and social maturation, during which adolescents engage in offending due to the frustration experienced by being biologically, but not socially mature, and thereby unable to fully participate in adult society.<sup>2</sup> According to Moffitt, most young offenders are on an adolescent limited trajectory, and offend as a result of the maturity gap desisting once they reach social maturity and are able to participate in the economy. In other words, once youth reach social maturity and are able to fully participate in "adult" society they generally stop engaging in the types of delinquency common during adolescence. For example, an individual may shoplift and fence goods as a way of making money in high school, but once they graduate, they may stop engaging in that behavior since they now have a credential that allows access to higher paying jobs.

More recently, research has begun to incorporate emerging adulthood into the discourse surrounding antisocial behavior. Recent studies explore the potential for criminal onset during

emerging adulthood, changes in offending behavior during emerging adulthood, the influence of turning points and social bonds on offending during emerging adulthood, as well as the influence of emerging adulthood on sexual behaviors and drug use.<sup>3</sup> Although these studies lay a solid foundation in the area of emerging adulthood, bringing it into the social science discourse, they have yet to fully conceptualize and theoretically link emerging adulthood into the offending literature. For example, the criminal career paradigm has been firmly linked to developmental stages in the life course. Scholars have found that offending onset, participation, frequency, and desistance are fairly well established concepts in relation to developmental life stages.<sup>4</sup> However, the same cannot be said about empirical research on emerging adulthood. Studies such as the ones conducted by Christopher Salvatore, Travis Taniguchi, and Wayne Welsh provide support for the notion that emerging adulthood could be integrated into Moffitt's developmental taxonomy but stop short of integrating the ideas empirically due to a lack of longitudinal analyses.<sup>5</sup> Due to the need for this integration, it is necessary to place emerging adulthood within the context of the criminological literature and connect it conceptually and empirically to existing research.

The National Institute of Justice supports the importance of emerging adulthood as an area of criminological inquiry. It conducted a large-scale project that focused on adolescence and emerging adulthood. The project, a "Study Group on the Transitions from Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime," had the goal of reviewing research findings about offending during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as exploring the policy implications for the criminal justice system. The "Study Group" utilized several developmental perspectives to review the scientific evidence focusing on offending behaviors between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine. Two key conclusions emerged from the study: there is a large gap in the research

dealing with this time period and there is a need for more research exploring why some adolescents transition out of crime during emerging adulthood, whereas others continue to offend.<sup>6</sup>

The above studies provide a useful starting point and establish emerging adulthood as a legitimate area of criminological inquiry, as well as the continued need for integration of emerging adulthood into theoretical paradigms in criminology. The aim of this study is to provide such integration by providing a theoretical mechanism, the ‘emerging adulthood gap,’ which integrates emerging adulthood into the life course or developmental area of criminological theory. This paper will present the ‘what’ of the emerging adulthood gap by introducing the concept and integrating it into existing theoretical paradigms, the ‘how’ by examining how social circumstances have altered the life course leading to the evolution of emerging adulthood as a distinct stage of the life course and to the ‘emerging adulthood gap,’ and the ‘why’ of the ‘emerging adulthood gap’ by discussing the decreased level of informal social controls experienced by those in emerging adulthood, which may make those in this stage of the life course prone to offending, substance abuse, and risky behaviors as part of their identity exploration and the instability characteristic of emerging adulthood, thereby tying emerging adulthood into criminological theory.

### Emerging Adulthood and Offending: An Overview

First discussed by Jeffrey Arnett in 1994, emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that occurs between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Emerging adulthood is often characterized by instability and as an age of exploration, during which drug, alcohol, and sexuality experimentation are common.<sup>7</sup> Essential is the understanding that emerging adulthood is not the adolescence or young adulthood of the past.<sup>8</sup> The journey from childhood to adulthood

is different than it was decades ago, with the key difference being that this process lasts far longer.<sup>9</sup> Changes in society, including delays in marriage and parenting, the commodification of higher education, and identity exploration, all have been identified as components that have led to the evolution of emerging adulthood as a unique stage of the life course.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, many in emerging adulthood experience an increase in social freedom as they are no longer subjected to the informal social controls of adolescence, such as parents and teachers. This increased level of social freedom provides opportunities for emerging adults to engage in risky and dangerous behaviors, including unsafe sex, substance use, and crime.

The convergence between emerging adulthood and antisocial behaviors is well established. Studies consistently find that dangerous and risky behaviors, such as binge drinking, smoking, unsafe driving, and unsafe sexual practices are all common in populations of emerging adults.<sup>11</sup> Turning more specifically to crime, Alex Piquero, Robert Brame, Paul Mazerolle, and Rudy Haapanen conducted one of the first studies to examine the influence of emerging adulthood on criminal activity, finding that arrest rates for both violent and nonviolent crimes peaked in their early twenties—i.e. during emerging adulthood. Additionally, they found that increases in social bonds, such as marriage, decreased arrests for nonviolent offenses, but did not influence arrests for violent crime.<sup>12</sup> In another study, Terrie Moffitt, Avshalom Caspi, Honalee Harrington, and Barry Milne used data from the Dunedin study to examine offenders in their mid-twenties, noting that many adolescent limited offenders were engaging in property crimes, substance use, and had other issues, such as financial problems.<sup>13</sup> Moffitt and her team note that emerging adulthood may have played a role in why those identified as adolescent limited offenders had yet to ‘age out’ as her original conceptualization of the Adolescent Limited

Offender in her 1993 dual taxonomy.<sup>14</sup> Both Piquero's and Moffitt's work provide evidence to suggest that emerging adulthood has impacted youth offending.

Subsequent studies incorporate the developmental processes indicative of emerging adulthood into explaining offending during this stage of the life course. Robert Marcus utilized data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to examine violent offending during emerging adulthood. Consistent with Arnett's work, Marcus found sensation seeking and violent offending declined as the sample aged out of emerging adulthood, and married.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Salvatore and Taniguchi used Add Health data to examine the role of social bonds and turning points identified in the life course literature—including in John Laub and Robert Sampson's 2003 landmark study—as influencing desistance. The results of their study provides support for the role of social bonds and turning points such as employment, marriage, parenthood, economic stability, and property ownership as influencing desistance during emerging adulthood.<sup>16</sup> Sung Joon Jang and Jeremy Rhodes also utilized Add Health data to examine the effects of strain on crime and drug use during emerging adulthood. Examples of strain that could influence offending and substance use during emerging adulthood include the ending of a romantic relationship, the loss of a job, or association with anti-social peers. Jang and Rhodes found that the effects of strain on offending and substance use were exacerbated during emerging adulthood by social bonds with offending peers and low-self-control.<sup>17</sup> The results of the abovementioned studies support Arnett's theory, as well as suggesting that there may be a 'maturity gap' in emerging adulthood like that identified by scholars during adolescence.

#### The Life Course Perspective: A Theoretical Framework for the Emerging Adulthood Gap

The life course perspective is the study of individual level changes in offending over time.<sup>18</sup> It is a multidisciplinary paradigm that incorporates ideas from biology, sociology,

psychology, criminal justice, and criminology. Instead of being a theory in the traditional sense, it is an alternative way of looking at and understanding human development.<sup>19</sup> Rolf Loeber and Marc LeBlac state that developmental criminology is the study of origins and dynamics of antisocial behaviors and offending according to age, and second, the examination of causal factors that are precursors to, or occur with, behavioral development that influence the life course.<sup>20</sup> Farrington argues that developmental and life course criminology is focused on documenting and explaining offending throughout a person's life course.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars, like Laub and Sampson, simplify the concept to the idea of making sense of people's lives.

Glen H. Elder, considered the preeminent figure in life course criminology, defined the life course in 1985 as the interconnected trajectory an individual has as they age through life.<sup>22</sup> A trajectory is defined as a sequence of linked stages within a set of experiences or range of behavior. For example, an individual's career trajectory is a series of linked stages, as people age, they go through stages of their career from entry level through executive positions, ceasing at retirement at approximately age sixty-five. As individuals move through their career trajectory, they move up in positions and levels in an organization. Entering into an administrative position could mark a change in the trajectory known as a transition. Transitions are built into trajectories, and the stages that are part of the trajectory are connected to each other by transitions.<sup>23</sup> For example, an individual who is casually dating someone may engage in drug dealing as a way to supplement their income. Once their relationship becomes more formalized through an engagement, they may no longer sell drugs, opting for a more respectable (legal) part-time job to supplement their income. However, if the relationship ends, so may the stabilizing force it provided, and the individual may revert to drug sales to supplement their income.

Turning our focus to the influence of social and biological maturation on offending, in addition to Moffitt's abovementioned developmental taxonomy other theoretical models explain key features of social and biological maturation (the 'what' examined in how the transition to adulthood leads to decreased offending), its origins (the 'why' most people stop or decrease offending as they reach adult social roles and turning points), and the cause of these changes (the 'how').

Laub and Sampson's model of age-graded social control focuses on the role of turning points, such as marriage, employment, and military service, in understanding the process of change in an offender.<sup>24</sup> Elder defines turning points as changes in the life course which have the ability to alter life trajectories.<sup>25</sup> Sampson and Laub conceptualize turning points as a process that occurs over time instead of drastic changes that occur instantly; turning points may be the causative agent that starts the process of change in an individual.<sup>26</sup> For example, getting a job may not instantly cause an individual to cease offending, but it may start a process through which an individual gradually moves towards building conventional bonds to their employer and coworkers, and gradually moves away from relationships with deviant peers. This summary of the life course theoretical paradigm, while brief, captures the essence of the increasingly prominent perspective. The life course perspective is a natural fit for emerging adulthood and the 'emerging adulthood gap.'

### Emerging Adulthood in the Context of the Moffitt's Developmental Taxonomy

Historically, adolescence is the period where identity exploration occurs and therefore delinquency is common. Moffitt argues that developmental changes in antisocial behaviors are best explained by her developmental taxonomy. This theory makes the distinction between two types of offenders: adolescent limited (AL) and life course persistent (LCP) offenders. ALs

generally have normal childhood backgrounds and start offending during adolescence, usually engaging in nonviolent crime, and desisting as they transition to adult social roles. In contrast, LCPs demonstrate antisocial behaviors in earlier in childhood, have less stable childhoods, commit nonviolent and violent offending during adolescence, and continue to commit violent crime in adulthood. LCPs account for approximately 6 percent of the male population, but commit roughly 50 percent of all violent crime.<sup>27</sup>

A large amount of scholarship has been devoted to testing Moffitt's developmental taxonomy, with the bulk of the research examining LCP offenders. Two conditions in early childhood are hypothesized to be the origin to LCP offending. The first is that LCPS suffer from neuropsychological deficits such as ADHD. These deficits are believed to be caused by several factors, including maternal drug and alcohol use during pregnancy, inadequate prenatal nutrition, birth complications, genetic factors, and pre- and postnatal exposure to toxic agents such as lead.<sup>28</sup> Moffitt identifies that harsh, abusive, and criminogenic home environments during childhood are key to the development of an LCP offender. In other words, Moffitt suggests that abusive, neglectful parenting can amplify the effects of neuropsychological deficits, whereas a more stable, prosocial family environment could reduce or nullify the antisocial effects of neuropsychological deficits.

Moffitt argues that LCPs may precipitate some of the offending in others, thereby furthering the development of ALs offending. Reflecting social learning theory, Moffitt suggests that ALs offenders were mimicking these behaviors to look more adult and penetrate the 'maturity gap' between biological and social maturity. She further states that the maturity gap is rooted in the fact that adolescents are sexually mature, yet they are still prevented from participating in adult behaviors such as military service, consuming alcohol, and working.<sup>29</sup>



Essentially, ALs challenge the maturity gap by imitating the behavior of their LCPs counterparts. The maturity gap can also be applied to desistance. As adolescents age, they are allowed more adult privileges and also build social bonds through marriage and employment that act to reduce, then erase the maturity gap. As such, those ALs who do not encounter any of the “snares” (defined by Moffitt as factors such as addiction or precocious pregnancy) that would knock ALs ‘off track’ and prevent their natural desistance.<sup>30</sup> ALs should desist; the potential influence of emerging adulthood could, however, act to create a new ‘emerging adulthood’ gap that allows opportunities for offending. The question becomes does emerging adulthood act as a ‘snare’ for ALs? If emerging adulthood does act as a ‘snare,’ how should it be integrated into criminological theory?

It may be possible that emerging adulthood acts to stimulate adult onset offending. Arnett argues that emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration which can be expressed through substance use and other forms of risky and dangerous behaviors.<sup>31</sup> Many prior studies exploring adult onset antisocial behavior has been limited by two criticisms: 1) it is an artifact of criminal record and 2) it does not exist because of the low base rate.<sup>32</sup> Prior research provides inconsistent findings regarding if adult onset offending is an artifact of criminal records. Several studies using self-report data have not found evidence for adult onset trajectories.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, several other studies using self-report data have found support for the existence of adult onset offending.<sup>34</sup> Based on the existing evidence, there has yet to be a consensus reached regarding the role of emerging adulthood as a factor on adult onset offending, potentially through an emerging adulthood ‘gap’ similar to Moffitt’s ‘maturity gap.’

A key issue to acknowledge is that the majority of the studies that did not find evidence for adult onset offending trajectories collected data before the 1990s. The participants in those

studies did not experience the social changes indicative of emerging adulthood identified by Arnett as occurring between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. These changes include postponement of marriage, the commodification of, and extension of education, as well as increased parental support that many experience by 'boomeranging' back to their parents' home.<sup>35</sup> As previously discussed, the bulk of emerging adults experience increased levels of freedom without the adult supervision of their high school years. This is of particular note as emerging adults can be separated into two general groups, those who either attend or do not attend college.

In 2007, Arnett raised the issue of subgroups in emerging adulthood, specifically those who are and are not involved in higher education.<sup>36</sup> Many in emerging adulthood, seeking to be competitive in an ever increasingly competitive global job market, continue their education in college, where they are subjected to a variety of life changes, such as stress, pressure to perform, and the autonomy of college and university life, whereas others do not attend college and may struggle to find jobs that allow them to earn a living wage.<sup>37</sup>

During emerging adulthood individuals are no longer subjected to teacher or parental controls compared to childhood and the earlier years of adolescence, yet they have not established permanent romantic relationships or bonds with employers and coworkers that can act to inhibit antisocial behaviors in adulthood. The increased freedom of emerging adulthood provides opportunities to engage in identity exploration through sexual and substance abuse experimentation.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, emerging adulthood may place some in a socially constructed snare or 'emerging adulthood gap' during which they engage in antisocial behaviors.

Although previous studies provide evidence for the onset of antisocial behavior in young adulthood, investigate the role of emerging adults bonds to parents on influencing offending

trajectories, and present the idea of an extension to Moffitt's developmental taxonomy, it is not clear if there is a 'gap' in emerging adulthood that operates in a similar manner to the maturity gap Moffitt identifies as the causative factor for most adolescents antisocial behaviors.<sup>39</sup> Here, it is proposed that there is 'emerging adulthood gap' that may explain why some offend during emerging adulthood whereas others do not participate in antisocial behaviors.

The discussion to this point reviews the life course paradigm, establishing that emerging adulthood is a valid and important area of criminological inquiry, and lays a foundation for the goals of this paper: 1) presenting the emerging adulthood gap (defining 'what' it is); 2) describing the social and economic changes that have allowed emerging adulthood—and in turn the 'emerging adulthood gap'—to develop (defining 'how' it occurs); and 3) to examine through what mechanisms the 'emerging adulthood gap' works (the 'why' of it).

#### The Emerging Adulthood Gap: The "What" of it

As established above, emerging adulthood is a distinct stage of the life course that criminologists and other social scientists have explored over the last twenty years. An ever increasing portion of this scholarship is examining risky and dangerous behaviors, such as unsafe sex and driving, and substance use, as well as criminal offending behaviors. These studies demonstrate that emerging adulthood is not simply a passing sociological fad, but rather a legitimate area of criminology inquiry that needs to be formally integrated into criminological theory. The above discussion establishes that the most natural fit for emerging adulthood is the life course paradigm, with its focus on transitions, turning points, social bonds, and biological as well as social maturation, as it closely parallels many of the conceptual and theoretical constructs that Arnett discusses throughout his work in emerging adulthood.<sup>40</sup> The first goal of this study is to integrate or place emerging adulthood into the life course paradigm. To accomplish this, a pre-

existing construct that closely parallels the idea of ‘emerging adulthood gap’ was needed. This exists in Moffitt’s maturity gap.

Emerging adulthood is an active period of criminal offending. Many turning points are postponed and as such social bonds that reduce offending and participation in risky and dangerous behaviors are absent or delayed during emerging adulthood. Unlike adolescence in which there are formal (e.g., teachers) and informal (e.g., parents) social controls to restrict or limit offending behaviors, these are largely not present in emerging adulthood. As such we have a group of largely socially and biologically mature youth, who in the past would have been married, having children, and working, unencumbered, and as such are stuck in an ‘gap’ during which most are completing higher education, experimenting with romantic relationships and their sexuality, and trying different types of work to see what suits them best. In other words, similar to Moffitt’s ‘maturity gap’ during adolescence, there is a similar ‘gap’ during emerging adulthood characterized by experimentation with substances, sexuality, and offending, reflecting the exploratory nature of emerging adulthood, as well as the lack of informal social controls on emerging adults. Hence, the emerging adulthood gap is defined as follows: a period during emerging adulthood in which there is an increased sense of exploration, freedom, and choice, often marked by offending, substance use, sexual experimentation, and risky behaviors, in which there are a decreased level of informal social controls. Due to the social maturity ‘gap’ caused by being in emerging adulthood some may be prone to offending, substance abuse, sexual experimentation, and other risky and dangerous behaviors. The ‘emerging adulthood gap’ provides a theoretical mechanism to explain offending during emerging adulthood. Youth in emerging adulthood, even though they are biologically and socially mature, still have not fully transitioned to adult roles, or as Arnett argues, are in a state of being ‘in between.’ This study

defines this ‘in between’ nature of emerging adulthood as the ‘emerging adulthood gap,’ and those in it may be more likely to engage in offending, in a similar manner to those in Moffitt’s ‘maturity gap’ of adolescence. Those in the ‘emerging adulthood gap’ will be binge drinking, speeding, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, engaging in unprotected sex, shoplifting, being loud and rowdy, but they will stop short of the more serious, violent, and predatory crimes characteristic of Moffitt’s life course persistent offenders.

#### The Emerging Adulthood Gap: The “How” of it

Several major changes occurred in the areas of marriage, parenting, and the economy to bring about emerging adulthood. Identified by Arnett and Laub and Sampson, as well as numerous others studies, marriage is one of the key transitions to adulthood, requiring conformity to social norms as part of the economic and romantic partnership. In the 1960s marriage trends changed, with people delaying marriage or choosing not to marry.<sup>41</sup> By delaying marriage, youth were now free to explore their sexuality and have a greater number of romantic partners. However, marriage provides informal social controls and social bonds which act to reduce offending behaviors and other risky behaviors, such as substance use. The delay or lack of marriage brought greater instability to the lives of young adults. Without the traditional role of husband or wife, emerging adults may have greater social freedoms and personal choices, but also more instability, and opportunities to offend and engage in dangerous behaviors. Without the social bonding created by marriage, young adults may be more apt to engage in identity exploration as discussed by Arnett, which can include sexual experimentation, substance use, and offending behaviors.<sup>42</sup>

Our next major area relates closely to the first—parenthood. As with marriage, the 1960s saw increasing delays in parenthood.<sup>43</sup> Delays in parenting continued to increase through the

1970s and 1980s, as well as an increased number of people who were not having children.<sup>44</sup> The life course literature identifies parenting as a key turning point away from offending.<sup>45</sup> Those with children need to not only protect themselves from injury, but also their children. Engaging in risky behaviors, such as offending and substance use, may place both parent and child in danger. Furthermore, engaging in these behaviors may threaten the parent's ability to provide for the child, and if the parent is incarcerated the children may be placed in foster care or be subjected to unstable conditions. As such, parenting is essential to the aging out commonly seen in offending,<sup>46</sup> without it young adults are free to explore their identities through sexual experimentation, drug and alcohol use, and offending.

Finally, changes to the economy had a profound impact on youth. Due to the shift from a manufacturing to a more service-based economy, as well as the increased commodification of education, more and more young adults need college educations or risk being in a labor market where they face decreased salary potential.<sup>47</sup> As an increased percentage of youth went to college, living in dorms or apartments away from parents, they were no longer subjected to the control of parents. College professors generally do not provide the same level of social control teachers in high school do, thereby leaving many in the eighteen-to-twenty-five-year-old range in environments where identity exploration and sensation seeking are common, and where there were few restrictions on their behaviors.<sup>48</sup>

In sum, emerging adulthood is the result of changing social circumstances in our society in the areas of marriage, parenting, and the economy. Those 'caught' in the emerging adulthood gap find themselves in this situation because they have not fully transitioned to adult life due to these changes. Those caught in the emerging adulthood gap are not married, are less likely to have children, and have not established the social bonds with employment. Combined with the

unstable and experimental nature of emerging adulthood, these individuals may participate in offending, substance use, and other risky behaviors until the fully transition out of the emerging adulthood gap by reaching adult social roles and transitions.

#### The Emerging Adulthood Gap: The “Why” of it

So ‘why’ does emerging adulthood act to stimulate these behaviors in youth? Arnett argues that emerging adulthood provides increased level of freedom and less social controls than high school.<sup>49</sup> Throughout emerging adulthood youth have increased levels of autonomy and less supervision from parents, both of which have been found to be related to alcohol and drug use.<sup>50</sup> Another factor that may influence the behavior of those caught in the emerging adulthood gap’ may be reflective of the ‘college experience.’<sup>51</sup> The challenges that accompany college or university life, such as peer pressure, may increase the risk for substance abuse.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the adjustment period to college life most students do not have direct supervision of parents, and this, combined with the experimental nature of emerging adulthood and the sensation seeking commonly found during this era, is a recipe for increased dangerous behaviors. It is important to note that both emerging adults attending and not attending college may be at higher risk for offending, substance use, and other risky behaviors, but there may be different factors influencing their behavior. Those in college may be adjusting to a new lifestyle characterized by more stress and pressure,<sup>53</sup> while those not attending college may face financial pressures, limited employment, or unemployment.<sup>54</sup>

There are several reasons ‘why’ being caught in the emerging adulthood gap (not being married, having children, employed full time, in other works fully transitioning to adult roles) influences offending behaviors. First, emerging adulthood is characterized by instability, sensation seeking, and a feeling of being ‘in between.’<sup>55</sup> As a result, many in emerging adulthood

find themselves experimenting with their sexuality, substance use, and in some cases offending behaviors, most of which would be lower-level offenses reflective of those committed by Moffitt's ALs. Next, there are decreased levels of informal and formal social controls during emerging adulthood. Once youth reach age twenty-one they are free to fully participate in adult life, parents no longer have control over their behavior, if they attend college, professors do not hold the authority of influence that teachers in high school do, and as such there are fewer controls on behavior during emerging adulthood, making it easier for youth to engage in dangerous or offending behaviors.

### Conclusion

This article identified key dimensions of the relationship between offending behaviors and emerging adulthood, synthesizing them into a single construct the emerging adulthood gap; a goal which had not been fully realizing in criminological theory until this point. Emerging adulthood straddles several disciplines including sociology, social psychology, and criminology, and over the last fifteen years an ever increasing portion of scholarship in criminal justice and criminology has been devoted to the subject. This article argues that the emerging adulthood gap offers a useful way to integrate emerging adulthood in the life course paradigm and to provide a mechanism through which to explain offending, substance abuse, and risky and dangerous behaviors during emerging adulthood.

It is clear that the emerging adulthood gap can provide an important theoretical mechanism to help explain why those in emerging adulthood may participate in low level offenses and risky and dangerous behaviors. Equally, it has shown that emerging adulthood can be integrated into a preexisting theoretical paradigm which could benefit from the integration of emerging adulthood.



There is ample scholarship in the area of emerging adulthood demonstrating that instability, sensation seeking, and identity exploration characteristic of this new stage of the life course impacts the behavior of youth. Arnett's research suggests that emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that impacts offending behaviors, including substance use. Most studies that have examined emerging adulthood from a criminological perspective have found it has some level of influence on offending behaviors. Studies such as that conducted by Salvatore, Welsh, and Taniguchi's seek to connect emerging adulthood theoretically to the life course paradigm, whereas others provide support for the notion that emerging adulthood provides a developmental period which may foster offending.

Further research is required to confirm the applicability of the emerging adulthood gap, in particular longitudinal research. There is evidence that many of the social bonds and turning points found in the life course literature to influence offending are relevant for many in emerging adulthood, but what has not been found is how offending during emerging adulthood impacts the trajectories of these individuals over the rest of their life course. As an emerging area, it has been challenging for studies to accomplish this goal, but as cohorts who have experienced emerging adulthood age, retrospective studies similar to that of Laub and Sampson's (which followed up with the men in the Glueck's Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency study when they were senior citizens) will provide valuable insight into the influence of emerging adulthood on offending and how being caught in the emerging adulthood gap shapes the lives of those who experienced it.

The identification of the emerging adulthood gap helps bring emerging adulthood into mainstream criminology, bridging a gap between disciplines and allowing criminological theory to incorporate an area of scholarship which now has over twenty years of empirical examination. As a multidisciplinary perspective, life course criminology is an ideal home for the 'emerging

adulthood gap’ as it reflects and builds upon Moffitt’s maturing gap and as emerging adulthood is a relatively new developmental stage, it fits within the realm of the life course perspective, in particular its focus on the influence of historical, economic, and social changes. Additionally, now that the emerging adulthood gap has been identified and placed in the context of the life course paradigm, future research is needed to study if it is applicable across sociodemographic factors such as gender and race/ethnicity, as well as if it applies to those in non-Western nations and cultures. Some studies suggest that there may be a cultured effect related to emerging adulthood; as such the emerging adulthood gap may have less (or more) influence in other cultures.<sup>56</sup>

The emerging adulthood gap has policy implications as well. Those caught in the ‘emerging adulthood gap’ as conceptualized here are likely to engage in lower-level offenses, substance use, and risky behaviors. Key to our conceptualization of the emerging adulthood gap is that most of these individuals will age out of these behaviors once they fully transition to adult roles, similar to how Moffitt’s adolescent limited offenders will age out of low level offending and delinquency once they transition out of adolescence and into adulthood. As such, those in the criminal justice and related systems (e.g., public health) may need to target intervention programs to deal with the unique developmental needs of emerging adults. For those who find their way into the criminal justice system, it may be that more traditional processing may be overly aggressive. Diversion programs aimed at emerging adults could be developed to factor in the ‘emerging adulthood gap’ and provide support for those during this stage of the life course. Programs such as an emerging adult court could incorporate the scholarship mentioned above to identify emerging adulthood as a distinct time of experimentation and exploration, as a result

increase rates of arrests for lower-level offenses and substance abuse should be expected as more and more experience the emerging adulthood gap.

## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Terrie E. Moffitt, "Adolescence Limited and Life Course Persistent Antisocial Behavior: A Developmental Taxonomy, *Psychological Review* 100 (1993): 674-701.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Heather L. Couture, "Criminal onset in emerging adulthood" (PhD, diss., University of Maryland, 2009). Retrieved using: <http://hdl.handle.net/1903/9234>; Andrea D. Mata, and Manfred H. M. Van Dulmen. "Adult-Onset Antisocial Behavior with Adolescent Family Processes and Emerging Adulthood Functioning." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27 (2012):177-193.; Badiyah Haffeejee, Jamie Rae Yoder, and Kimberly Bender, "Changing in Illegal Behavior During Emerging Adulthood." *Advances in Social Work* 14 (2013): 458-76.; <sup>3</sup> Michael Markowitz, and Christopher Salvatore, "Exploring Race Based Differences in Patterns of Life Course Criminality," *Deviant Behavior* 33(2012): 589-605.; Christopher Salvatore, and Michael Markowitz, "Do Life Course Transitions and Social Bonds Influence Males and Females Differently? Gender Contrasts and Criminality" *Deviant Behavior* 35 (2014): 628-53.; Christopher Salvatore, and Travis Taniguchi, "Do Social Bonds Matter for Emerging Adults?," *Deviant Behavior* 33 (2012): 1-19.; Christopher Salvatore, Travis Taniguchi, and Wayne Welsh, "Is Emerging Adulthood Influencing Moffitt's Developmental Taxonomy? Adding the "Prolonged" Adolescent Offender," *Western Criminology Review* 13 (2012): 1-15. ; Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Risk Behavior and Family Role Transitions During the Twenties," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 27(1998): 301-19.; R. F. Marcus, "Cross-Sectional Study of Violence in Emerging Adulthood," *Aggressive Behavior* 35(2009): 188-202.; Alex R. Piquero, Robert Brame, Paul Mazerolle, and Rudy Haapanen, R. (2002). Crime in Emerging Adulthood," *Criminology* 40 (2002): 137-69. ; <sup>3</sup> Helen Raskin White, and Kristina Jackson, "Social and psychological influences on emerging adult drinking behavior," *Alcohol Research & Health* (2004): 182-90.

<sup>4</sup> David C. Pyrooz, "From Your First Cigarette to Your Last Dyin' Day: The Patterning of Gang Membership in the Life Course," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 30(2013):349-72.

<sup>5</sup> Salvatore, Taniguchi, and Welsh, "Is Emerging Adulthood Influencing Moffitt's Developmental Taxonomy? Adding the "Prolonged" Adolescent Offender," 1-15.

<sup>6</sup> Rolf Loeber, and David P. Farrington, *From Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime: Criminal Careers, Justice Policing, and Prevention*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey J. Arnett, "The Developmental Context of Substance Use in Emerging Adulthood," *The Journal of Drug Issues* 35(2005): 235-54.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teen through the Twenties, *American Psychologists* 55 (2000): 469-80.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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