Youth delinquency among certain migrant populations has been getting a lot of attention in the Netherlands during the last two decades. ‘Moroccan’ boys have a reputation for causing nuisance in public places and committing (serious and violent) youth crime. Their delinquent behavior in groups is considered ‘noticeable’, in the sense that the public as well as the police perceive it as extremely confrontational and aggressive.

To a certain extent delinquent group behavior of ‘Moroccan’ boys can be explained by migration history, concentrations of migrants groups in underdeveloped neighborhoods and changing police tactics. However, ‘non-Moroccan’ boys who also have a migrant background (like Surinamese or Turkish boys) and who grow up under similar social-economic circumstances, seem to get into less trouble with law enforcement. Their delinquent group behavior is not considered as noticeable as that of the ‘Moroccan’ boys. That is why some researchers seek explanations in cultural factors such as a ‘conflicting’ ethnic and/or religious family background in order to explain the distinctive character of delinquent group behavior of ‘Moroccan’ boys in the Netherlands.

These anthropologists, sociologists and criminologists argue that typical Moroccan notions on manliness, honor and distrust developed by their (fore)fathers in Morocco, are being reproduced by the ‘Moroccan’ boys in the Netherlands when they form groups in the streets. In this view cultural reproduction can explain why the delinquent group behavior of these boys sticks out as more confrontational and aggressive, and also labels it as ‘typically Moroccan’. In the last decade this kind of explanation has become increasingly popular, not only in the social sciences but especially in politics, in the media and in everyday discussions on this social problem. This feeds accepted forms of racism as a side-effect.

In this dissertation I also address the issue of the noteworthy delinquent group behavior of ‘Moroccan’ boys. I argue, however, that explanations for this behavior do not have to be sought in how these boys differ as ‘Moroccans’ (or Muslims). They can also be found in the general human needs for acknowledgement, entertainment and safety, which they have to satisfy in groups on the streets under the special circumstances of being ‘foreigners’ (children of immigrants) growing up in a disadvantaged urban neighborhood. General social processes influence their
group development and group conflicts within these special circumstances, and
can explain the development of noticeable delinquent group behavior.

These ‘group dynamic processes’ help us understand what kind of groups
these boys form and why. Furthermore, these social processes explain how they
develop their own street culture with a number of behavioral expectations that
endorse certain types of (serious) delinquent behavior. Also they make clear why
groups of ‘Moroccan’ boys in particular experience a great amount of ‘peer pres-
sure’ and – as a group – can derail very quickly and unexpectedly. They explain
why these boys view groups of outsiders – especially the Dutch – as their enemy
and what this means in terms of victimization and conceptions of loyalty. Finally,
these ‘group dynamic processes’ give us an insight in how and why outside reac-
tions to their group behavior give rise to secondary motives for misbehaving and
also to legitimizations of delinquent acts.

In short, a theory based on general human needs and group dynamic pro-
cesses explains why an increased intensity of delinquent behavior in ‘Moroccan’
groups flows logically from a combination of social-economic conditions in neigh-
borhoods, common street culture in big cities, and specific inter-group relations
in Dutch society. In conclusion, I argue that it is not only unwise to label their
noteworthy delinquent group behavior as ‘typically Moroccan’ from a scientific
point of view, but that it is also most likely that these cultural explanations feed the
very processes that make their delinquent group behavior so noticeable.