Academic interest in human trafficking grew dramatically in the years following two major pieces of legislation. In the United States, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defined and criminalized human trafficking at the federal level. That same year, the United Nations also passed a convention that defined the crime of human trafficking under international law. In the decade prior to 2000, the annual number of academic publications on human trafficking wavered between two hundred and three hundred. As figure 1 shows, the number of new publications on the topic of human trafficking in the two decades following 2000 grew to over sixteen thousand.

More detailed analyses of the human trafficking literature have found similar increases. One literature synthesis found 218 research-based journal articles published between 1975 and 2007, with 91 percent of those being published between 2000 and 2007 (Goździak and Bump 2008). Another study of 1,231 articles published between 2000 and 2014 found a steady and substantial increase over time. These articles spanned a wide variety of disciplines, though the top five over time included law, international relations/human rights, criminology, medicine/health, and social science (Russell 2018). New scholarly journals have also been introduced specifically on the topic of human trafficking, including Anti-Trafficking Review in 2011 and the Journal of Human Trafficking in 2015.

Beyond increasing in volume, scholarly research on human trafficking has expanded its focus over time, though stark differences can still be seen. As figure 2 shows, the number of new publications appearing in Google Scholar differs dramatically by whether the focus is sex trafficking or labor trafficking.
Most of the growth has been in the area of sex trafficking, though research on labor trafficking has increased within the past decade.

This trend is again reflected in others’ findings of the state of the literature (Goździak and Bump 2008; Goździak and Graveline 2015), with one review finding that 70 percent of labor trafficking articles were published in the years after 2009 (Russell 2018). Articles in the discipline of criminology were no different, with one study finding that among 159 criminology articles...
published on human trafficking between 2000 and 2014, 53 percent focused on sex trafficking, 43 percent on human trafficking in general, 3 percent on labor trafficking, and 1 percent on organ trafficking (Russell 2018).

The human trafficking literature has importantly centered on documenting trafficking routes; estimating the scope of the problem; classifying countries as source, transit, or destination; and understanding legal and policy responses to human trafficking. Research on victim experiences and needs has grown, as has research around awareness, training, and education (Russell 2018). The extent of a criminological and criminal justice focus is seen in the high number of articles that emphasize issues with trafficking laws, legal reform, new policy development, and evaluation of current policies (Russell 2018).

THEORY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A major issue within the human trafficking literature that has been identified by scholars is the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework. Theorizing on human trafficking remains underdeveloped and fragmented across disciplines (Gożdziak 2015; Kakar 2017; Limoncelli 2009a). A study of over one thousand scholarly articles found that less than 5 percent of the total sample was based on a theory (Russell 2018). No specific theories have been developed to explain human trafficking. Instead, among trafficking research that has made use of theory, it has applied a variety of existing theories (Kakar 2017).

This fragmentation has led to different disciplines applying their own theories and frameworks that emphasize different concerns. This includes theories such as anthropological theory, political theory, feminist theory, anomie/strain theory, theories of corporate responsibility, economic theories, and life course theory (Franchino-Olsen 2021a; Russell 2018). Limoncelli (2009a, 72) notes these different approaches, “Criminologists see trafficking as an issue of crime and law enforcement, migration scholars see it as a corrupted form of labor migration, human rights scholars see it as a violation of individual rights, and feminists tend to see it as a gender issue.” The development and integration of theory into the study of human trafficking is important to the advancement of the field. Theory is necessary to fully understand and grapple with the wide array of complex factors that go into a crime like human trafficking, explaining both the causes and persistence of trafficking. Criminological theories in particular have been noted for their ability to
address the motives of traffickers, victim vulnerabilities, and other patterns within this crime type (Russell 2018).

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this volume, as part of the larger *Criminology Explains* series, is to provide the reader with a book that is both comprehensive and accessible in regard to the intersections between theory, research, and policy. The topic of human trafficking is used to allow the reader to apply theory to explore issues such as sex versus labor trafficking, victims versus offenders, migration and globalization, domestic and international law and policy, and the wide array of anti-trafficking efforts. Through this book readers will gain an understanding of theory as it applies to the field of human trafficking, including how various levels of analysis from the local to the global are often linked. As human trafficking is a topic that is often cross-disciplinary in nature, literature outside of criminology has been incorporated when it reflects the principles or concepts of criminological theory.

Following the format of other books in the series, this book may be read alone or in conjunction with the corresponding chapters of a criminology textbook. Chapter 1 offers an overview of human trafficking, describing the nature and extent of the issue, measurement issues and challenges, and how the topic of human trafficking has been socially constructed. Chapter 2 applies deterrence theory, rational choice theory, routine activities theory, and victimization theories to human trafficking. This includes exploration of issues such as various policy models of prostitution and sex trafficking, the risks and rewards of trafficking, situational crime prevention, and the intersection between intimate partner violence and human trafficking. Chapter 3 considers psychological theories, examining the question of whether traffickers are psychopaths, the grooming and trauma of trafficking victims, and the victim-offender overlap that often occurs among survivors. Chapter 4 discusses social structure theories, including social disorganization theory and spatial patterns of trafficking, the application of various anomie and strain theories to different types of trafficking, and the use of subcultural theories in explaining the role of organized crime and gang involvement in trafficking. Chapter 5 looks at social process theories, including the role of family and peers in control and learning theories and how labeling theory can be used to understand moral panics of trafficking. Chapter 6 explores various
critical perspectives. This includes cultural criminology and media representations of trafficking, conflict theories and questions of justice, feminist and queer perspectives to understand both victims and offenders, and critical race theory as it applies to intersectional inequality and carceral responses to human trafficking. Finally, chapter 7 addresses various integrationist perspectives, including life-course and development theory, and finally, social-ecological theory. Each chapter also contains a policy box that showcases how theory can be linked to real cases or policies on human trafficking, as well as resources and discussion questions for further thought.