Think about the most consuming events since the turn of the twenty-first century, those that grabbed the attention of the public through news headlines and in daily conversations. Interethnic conflicts in Sudan, Congo, and Iraq in which rival militia slaughter men and use savage serial rapes to subdue and dehumanize women. The Catholic Church hierarchy and faithful continue to grapple with the effects of dozens of years of sexual abuse of male and female children at the hands of its priests. Amish schoolgirls are murdered by a distraught man who blamed his actions on his putative past as a child sex abuser. Bullied adolescent boys execute their peers and teachers in a bloody mass murder at Columbine High School in Colorado. Thousands of female children are sold into sexual slavery by impoverished families or kidnapped for sale in lucrative, government-sanctioned sex industries around the globe. Multiple women come forward with complaints of groping and sexual harassment, yet Arnold Schwarzenegger is still elected the governor of California.

These diverse events have a common link: male perpetrators, acting alone or in groups, for whom violence and violation are rational solutions to perceived problems ranging from the need to inflate one’s sexual self-esteem to denigrating rivals in war to boosting a country’s GNP. They also demonstrate the real harm that women face on a daily basis in a world that views them sometimes as property, often as pawns, and usually as secondary citizens in need of control by men. These events are also similar in that they are not random. Several of these examples are deemed newsworthy on an international scale, given their political implications or the celebrity of perpetrators, but they represent only a fraction of the violence against women and children that is committed on a daily basis across the world. If you read your own community newspaper or scan local televised newscasts, you will find hundreds of similar events in any given month. These incidents, while often writ small, stand as clear testimony to the insidious problem of gender violence.

Acts of gender violence are similarly ubiquitous throughout history. Rape has been a tool of warriors for centuries. Working women experienced men’s coercive sexual behaviors long before the term sexual harassment was coined. Gender violence often links divergent cultures as well. The incest taboo, so long identified by scholars as uni-
versal across cultures, appears to be more a taboo against speaking about incest than a successful mechanism of social control.

Violence at the beginning of the twenty-first century extends from individual relationships to the arrangement of power and authority in organizations to the relations among countries of the world. Broadly speaking, violence is a mainstay in the entertainment and news media, in national and international politics, in family dynamics, and in our social constructions of sexual desire. It simultaneously intrigues and repels us. Although most violence worldwide is male-on-male, the emergence of self-conscious women’s political movements and greater global attention to universal human rights, combined with academic inquiry, begs closer scrutiny of the patterns of male violence against women and children, both in intimate relationships and in public.

As a central organizing principle among human groups, gender is the constellation of personal attributes assigned to men and women in any culture. It is a primary characteristic by which we structure intimate relationships, divide labor, assign social value, and grant privilege. In most contemporary societies, dualistic gender systems endure, with clearly demarcated boundaries between that which is considered masculine and that which is considered feminine—temperamentally, physically, sexually, and behaviorally. Gender is simultaneously a deeply embedded aspect of individual personalities and structural social arrangements; however, it is also contested social terrain. Gender relations are a complicated mix of congeniality and conflict; yet, in either case, they are almost always imbued with an asymmetrical distribution of power. They are the product of social and cultural dynamics, historical forces, political and economic structures, and interpersonal processes. In many societies and for many individuals, however, it is the conflicted aspects of gender relations that are the most prominent.

We understand violence as the extreme application of social control. Usually understood as the use of physical force, it can take a psychological form when manifested through direct harassment or implied terroristic threats. Violence can also be structural, as when institutional forces such as governments or medical systems impinge on individuals’ rights to bodily integrity or contribute to the deprivation of basic human needs. By our definition, gender violence is any interpersonal, organizational, or politically oriented violation perpetrated against people due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or location in the hierarchy of male-dominated social systems such as families, military organizations, or the labor force. Much of the violence in contemporary society serves to preserve asymmetrical gender systems of power. For example, compulsory aggression as a central component of masculinity serves to legitimate male-on-male violence; sexual harassment is a means of controlling the public behavior of women; assaults on gay, lesbian, and transgendered people are a way of punishing them for “gender transgressions”; and rape is a standard tool for domination in war, in prison subcultures, and in too many intimate relationships.

Clearly and consistently documented throughout human history, the forms that such violence assumes—rape, battering, child abuse, and murder—constitute some of the most pressing and enduring social problems of our times. Given the centrality of gender and the ubiquity of violence, it is no wonder that they are interwoven in our social systems. The systems in which they are embedded are complex; simplistic expla-
nations or simple solutions will not suffice. Explicating the problem of gender violence demands a comprehensive, multifaceted framework.

This volume attempts to provide such an interdisciplinary framework. It is the outgrowth of our personal and collegial efforts to understand the phenomenon of gender violence to a fuller extent than discipline-specific analysis currently allows. We are sociologists by training and continue to see the value of our discipline in explaining the significance of context in the study of gender violence—that is, the ways in which the organization of both interpersonal interaction and social institutions such as the law, economies, and religions contribute to the social construction of gender and to gendered violence. As participants in interdisciplinary gender studies throughout our careers, we have been engaged by the important analyses of our colleagues in the social sciences and humanities that have enriched the study of gender relations, in many cases preceding sociology in uncovering significant social facts as well as the subdued and silenced voices of women. The poems and articles in this book have contributed to our own understanding of the interpersonal and structural dynamics of gender violence, as well as both the historical evolution and the contemporary manifestations of gender relations. We share that understanding here, weaving together the voices of other scholars and artists with our own thoughts on how to best interpret the vast and ever-expanding literature on gender violence. We do this while acknowledging that the literature cannot completely represent the horrifying expanse of empirical evidence and personal experiences of physical and sexual assault, harassment, and murder.

So why have we called this book *Gender Violence* rather than *Violence against Women*? Some explication of our terms is appropriate, particularly since there is not yet an approved lexicon to define the violence that we are describing, interrogating, and problematizing. Although documenting and exploring the violation of women has been the primary focus of research and activism among feminist and pro-feminist analysts, we have chosen to include a broader set of questions that spring from the study of gender and violence. In what ways are ideas about gender and sexual identity used to legitimate violence against individuals and groups, regardless of their biological sex? To what extent does the social construction of gender facilitate male-on-male violence? Can and should men, at least in some cases, be acknowledged as indirect victims of violence against women? By widening our analytical lens, we are able to incorporate important connections among violence against children, heterosexual women and men, and lesbians, gay men, and transgendered persons, and we suggest important questions about structural and interpersonal violence for future analysis.

*Gender Violence* is organized into three parts. Part 1 contains a sociohistorical exploration of gender violence, focusing first across cultures, then more specifically on the conditions that give rise to gender violence in the United States. Part 2 examines various forms of gendered violence. Part 3 presents the current deliberations about transforming gender relations and ending gender violence. Each section of the book includes an introduction, suggested readings, and chapters that represent important contributions to the study of gender violence from a wide spectrum of academic and activist perspectives. Although the chapters primarily address issues of gender violence in the United States, we have integrated international perspectives into the analytical
framework of the book. We include research-based articles, theoretical and critical analyses, and essays.

The reader will notice that every section is prefaced by a poem. We have organized the book this way in part to set the tone for the more scholarly analysis that follows and in part to periodically break away from this analysis so as to hear women’s voices unfettered by disciplinary jargon or academic theory. Understanding gender violence requires a merging of the analytical and experiential realms. Working toward a solution will ultimately require an understanding of both social dynamics and of the pain and tragedy that gender violence wreaks in the lives of women, men, and children around the world.

Among the anthologized works, the reader will note some inconsistency in terminology and capitalization in reference to racial/ethnic groups. These differences reflect the conventions and preferences of the different time periods when these chapters were originally crafted. In our introductory essays, we have chosen to capitalize all referents to racial or ethnic categories.

This volume is necessarily incomplete. There are many more insightful analyses and powerful voices than space permits. Many have yet to speak, and our search for solutions is far from complete. We hope this book will contribute to the dialogue among students, activists, and scholars concerned about understanding and eradicating gender violence. We believe such a dialogue is crucial, and we have attempted to design the book in a way that is accessible to all these constituencies.

Many people have encouraged us to take on this project and provided helpful commentary along the way. Colleagues, friends, and family who have supported and inspired us in various, often indispensable ways include Greg Adamo, Candace Archer, Andrea Bertone, Carolyn Bitzer, Suzanne Cherrin, Brandy Collier, Cindy DiMattia, Heidi Dobish, Cheryl Doerr, Tammy Kiter, Rita Maloy, Steve Maloy, Frank Newton, Kathleen O’Toole, Liz Park, Guy Rains, Cecily Sawyer-Harmon, Josh Schiffman, Judy Schneider, Angela Seguin, Monika Shafi, Margaret Stetz, Caroline Timmins, Florine Timmins, Donna Tuites, Kathleen Turkel, Emilie VanDyke, and Tara Woolfolk. Karen Gaffney, Marie Laberge, and Emma Timmins-Schiffman read chapter drafts and provided us with many helpful suggestions. Laura Levitt made a last-minute connection for us that filled an important gap in the manuscript. We offer particular thanks to Anastasia Hudgins, who produced a wonderful essay in record time and made it look easy. Emily Hayworth generously provided many hours of clerical assistance from her student workers. Liz Rooney assisted in numerous ways. Brigid Jennings provided significant clerical assistance, enabling us to complete the project in a timely fashion. We also sincerely appreciate the tenacity and courage of many current and former students at the University of Delaware, Guilford College, Roanoke College, and Shepherd University who have confronted the difficult questions we have posed about gender and violence, often bearing the weight of great personal trauma. They have taught us a lot.

Our editor, Ilene Kalish, supported our desire to revise the first edition. She particularly gave us great leeway to bring our vision to fruition. Salwa Jabado was always available to graciously answer our many questions. Finally, we thank the contributors to this volume for their vision, with special gratitude to Annie Cossins, Betsy Erbaugh, William Gay, Anastasia Hudgins, LeeAnn Iovanni, Michael Johnson, Tara Kent, Michael Kimmel, Patricia Yancey Martin, Susan Miller, Nan Stein, and Margaret Stetz.