As we write this preface to our third edition, the ongoing struggle to eradicate gender violence, or at least lessen its pervasiveness, is as salient as ever. Gender violence is still integrally entwined in myriad world events and the experiences of individuals worldwide. Consider political strife and civil upheavals such as the genocidal attacks against the Rohingya people of Myanmar in which rape is a quotidian feature or the upswing of awareness about sexual harassment in workplaces including Hollywood, universities, restaurants, modeling agencies, factories, the arts, and seemingly everything in between. Acts of gender violence are ubiquitous throughout history. Rape has been a correlate of war for centuries. Working women experienced men’s coercive sexual behaviors long before the term sexual harassment was coined.

While specifics of gender violence may change, the underlying causes cry out for attention. The pervasiveness and intricacies of gendered systems and relationships, as well as our greater understanding of the intersubjective experience of cisgender and transgender men and women in various cultural contexts, all demonstrate the extent to which problems of gender are in need of continued and rigorous study. Data indicates that support for egalitarian views among US eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds has decreased significantly in the past two decades (Coontz 2017) contributing to a climate of power differentials that increase the likelihood of violence. In a sad commentary on the normalization of gender violence, the forty-fifth president of the US was caught on video claiming that he had grabbed women’s genitals without consent, yet a sufficient number of people did not view his actions as a serious barrier to voting him into office. All paint a picture of the Sisyphean effort it requires to eliminate gender violence.

We continue to build on the stalwart efforts of generations past, while faced with new permutations that reflect increasing complexity within societies and global relationships. The urgency to address gender violence is evidenced by the many current events deemed newsworthy on an international scale given their political implications or the celebrity of perpetrators. Even so, these represent
only a fraction of the violence against women, children, and the LGBTQ+ communities committed on a daily basis across the world. If you read your own local newspaper or scan televised newscasts or online news sources, 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.

Framing the Concepts of Gender, Violence, and Gender Violence

Gender is the culturally specific constellation of personal attributes assigned to men and women and a central organizing principle among human groups. It is a primary characteristic that structures intimate relationships and provides guidelines for dividing labor, assigning social values, and granting privileges. 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—though restrictive binary categories are giving way to more fluid understandings of gender in some cultures, with implications for how we understand the topics we address in this book.

For example, Germany now requires that all public documents, including birth certificates, add either a third gender category or dispense with gender altogether. At present, eight countries recognize more than two genders on passports or national identity cards (Eddy and Bennett 2017). In the US, California, Oregon, and Washington allow a third option on birth certificates, and New York City enacted a law allowing “X” as a choice as of 2019 (Newman, 2018). These changes acknowledge that “[y]ou can’t necessarily read from people’s bodies what their gender means to them” (Appiah 2018).

Gender is simultaneously a deeply embedded aspect of individual personalities and structural social arrangements; yet, 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 imperatives, and interpersonal interactions. In many societies and for many individuals, however, it is the conflicted aspects of gender relations that are the most prominent.

Violence 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, greater global attention to universal human rights and human security, and academic inquiry begs closer scrutiny of the patterns of male violence
against women and children, as well as against other men, both in intimate relationships and in public expressions. It is clear, for example, that societies differ in the amount of violence tolerated and types of violence that occur, making it possible to envision successful methods to reduce its prevalence.

We understand violence as the extreme application of social control, usually understood as the use of physical force. It can take psychological forms, when manifested through direct harassment or implied terroristic threats, or symbolic forms, through interactions and advice that shape how women internalize caution and fear (e.g., the home is safe) while simultaneously increasing fear (Morgan and Björkert 2006). 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 sex, 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. Salter (2012, 3) points to an insidious aspect of gender-based violence, what he terms “invalidation,” whereby “the power to dismiss, trivialise or silence the perspective of another is not evenly distributed throughout society but [is] rather a specific dimension of masculine privilege . . .”

Compulsory aggression as a central component of masculinity serves to legitimate male-on-male violence; sexual harassment is a means of controlling women's public behavior and access to power; assaults on gay, lesbian, and transgender people serve as punishment for “gender transgressions”; and rape is a standard tool for domination in war, in prisons, and in too many intimate relationships. Clearly and consistently documented throughout human history, the forms that such violence assumes—rape, intimate partner violence, child abuse, and murder—constitute some of the most pressing and enduring social problems. 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 explanations or simple solutions will not suffice. Explicating the problem of gender violence demands a comprehensive, multifaceted framework.

The Structure of this Edition

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. Our own scholarly training includes degrees in clinical social work, education, and sociology. We see the value of our disciplines in explaining the
significance of context in the study of gender violence. As participants in interdisciplinary gender studies throughout our careers, we have been engaged by the important analysis of our colleagues in the social sciences and humanities that has enriched the study of gender relations, in many cases preceding our disciplines in uncovering significant social facts as well as the subdued and silenced voices of women, children, and marginalized men.

The poems and chapters 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.

Although documenting and exploring the violation of women has been a 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 how one identifies with their gender assigned at birth? To what extent does the social construction of gender influence male-on-male violence? Can and should men and boys be acknowledged as indirect victims of violence against women, at least in some cases, such as those who witness intimate partner violence? 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 transgender people, and we suggest important questions about structural and interpersonal violence for future analysis.

There are some victories: women elected to high office in increasing numbers around the world, the #MeToo movement and its correlates, the Women's March on Washington and throughout the globe that continues to inspire local action to address specific problems from Austria to Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan, Japan, and many locales in between. These developments encourage us to persevere, to not lose hope in the face of the daunting effort required to create change despite grinding disappointments. We write this fully committed to reducing human suffering and in the belief that change is possible—indeed essential.

*Gender Violence* is organized into three parts. Part 1 contains a sociohistorical exploration of gender violence, focusing first on some foundational ideas and theoretical concepts about its construction, then more specifically on a template that allows us to analyze gender violence across the globe. Part 2 examines various forms of gendered violence. Part 3 presents inspiring insights and practices to help us transform gender relations and end 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 many chapters address issues of gender violence in the US, we have integrated a sizeable number of international perspectives. 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 to hear 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 both of social dynamics and of the pain and tragedy that gender violence wreaks in the lives of women, men, and children around the world.

This volume is necessarily incomplete. There are many more insightful analyses, theoretical elaborations, and powerful voices than space permits us to include. 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 Cecile Andrews, Robin Brownstein, Carolyn Byerly, Cassandra Cupka, Jacque Ensign, Felicity Gray, Marie Laberge, Rachel Lodge, Kay McGraw, Steve Meade, Tom Menduni, James Mitchell, Kathleen O’Toole, Carol Post, Carol Rudisell, Rebecca Schachter, Carol Schouboe, Ellen Smith, Barbara Sullivan, and Pat Timmins. Ryan Cramton, Nicole Gostanian, Lily McCaughey, Delesha Moore, and Dan Titus provided significant technical assistance in building crucial components of the manuscript. Ronen Elad, Christian Meade, Emma Timmins-Schiffman, and Ethan Timmins-Schiffman read chapter drafts and provided us with numerous helpful suggestions. We also sincerely appreciate the tenacity and courage of many current and former students at the University of Delaware, Guilford College, Roanoke College, Salve Regina University, and Westfield State University who confront the difficult questions we pose about gender and violence, often bearing the weight of great personal trauma. They have taught—and continue to teach—us a lot.

Our editor, Ilene Kalish, supported our desire to update this work. She particularly gave us great leeway to bring our vision to fruition. Assistant editor Sonia Tsuruoka was always available to answer our many questions; she helped us beyond expectations. We thank the contributors to this volume for their vision,
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Editors’ Note

As this book goes to press in April 2020, the world has been upended in unimaginable ways. Among its effects, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 requires social distancing, relegating people across the globe to confined living spaces. This virtual imprisonment increases the risk of gender violence. Preliminary data from international NGOs indicates already spiraling rates of intimate partner violence and child abuse. In short, this pandemic within a pandemic is exposing the social, economic, and political fault lines that we address in this volume.