

# The Relationship between Gender and Coercive Control in the Context of Domestic and Family Violence

Dr Jamilla Rosdahl  
Senior Research Officer, CQU



 Queensland Centre for  
Domestic and Family  
Violence Research

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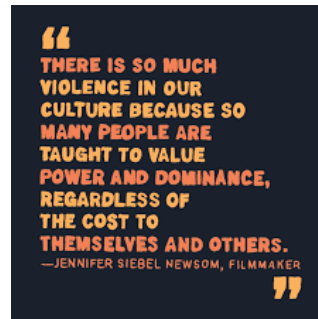
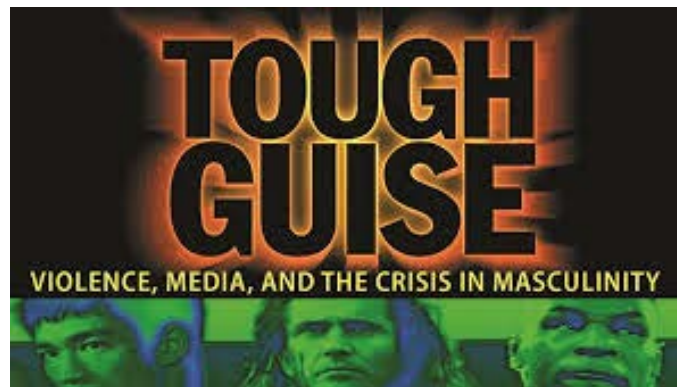
- Cultural ideas on gender contribute to patterns of coercive behaviour which shape men's control over women in intimate relationships.
- Normative ideas on gender prevent us from recognising coercive control as a serious and dominant form of domestic abuse.

Morriss, C., Rosdahl, J. & Amaral, F. 'Private Pain & Public Despair: Critical Sociological Perspectives on Domestic Violence as a Public Issue' (forthcoming 2018).



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# Masculinity, Culture and Patterns of Human Behaviour

*“...being a victim of domestic violence means that someone is taking your body, mind and soul hostage”*  
(research informant, 2015).

(Morriss, Rosdahl & Amaral forthcoming, 2018).



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# So what?

- One in four women have experienced emotional abuse by an intimate partner (ABS, 2012).
- Women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence from a partner (Cox, 2016).
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is one of the most common forms of violence against women (ABS, 2012).
- Intimate Partner Violence has long term effects on women's health including poor mental health, problems during pregnancy and birth, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, injuries and even homicide (Webster, 2016).

Statistics in Australia:

[Violence against women key statistics](#)

# Domestic and Family Violence

- Covers a wide range of violent, abusive and intimidating behaviors committed within intimate relationships, or between two people who have been in a relationship
- Impacts on and involves family members, children, partners or caregivers
- Causes fear, physical harm and/or psychological harm

(*White Ribbon* Australia, Domestic violence definition, 2018).



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You can't undo violence. **Know where to draw the line.**

**THE  
LINE**  
.ORG.AU

## You need the RSPCA

### The RSPCA does far more than just rescue kittens.

Every day, through a range of programs and services that you probably never knew existed, we also help people in emotional and physical danger: Women staying in violent relationships for fear their pets will be killed. Children being cruel to animals because they, themselves, have been abused. People with serious psychological problems hoarding and mistreating animals.

The RSPCA helps all of them through programs that no one else will provide if we don't. It costs over \$80 million a year to do this as well as keep our shelters open and run all our animal welfare services. But only 2% of this is government funded. The rest comes from people like you.

### The RSPCA needs you. Donate now.

**Whilst we appreciate your admiration, we desperately need your money.**

**1** Donate  
Online

Click here ▶

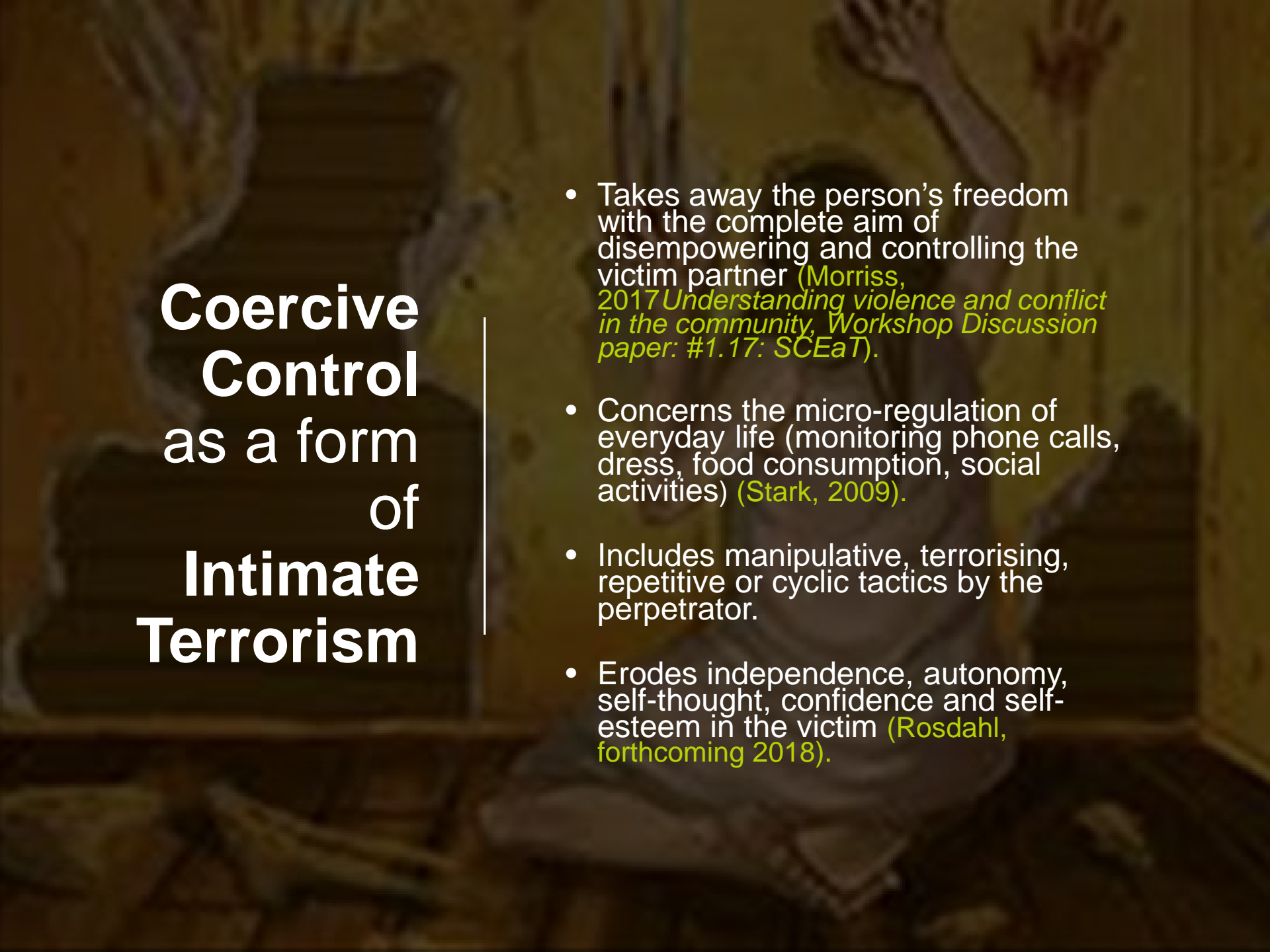
**2** Or Call

1300 RSPCA1

**3** Or send a  
cheque to

RSPCA Australia  
PO Box 265  
Deakin West,  
ACT 2600 AUS





# Coercive Control as a form of Intimate Terrorism

- Takes away the person's freedom with the complete aim of disempowering and controlling the victim partner (Morriss, 2017 *Understanding violence and conflict in the community, Workshop Discussion paper: #1.17: SCEaT*).
- Concerns the micro-regulation of everyday life (monitoring phone calls, dress, food consumption, social activities) (Stark, 2009).
- Includes manipulative, terrorising, repetitive or cyclic tactics by the perpetrator.
- Erodes independence, autonomy, self-thought, confidence and self-esteem in the victim (Rosdahl, forthcoming 2018).

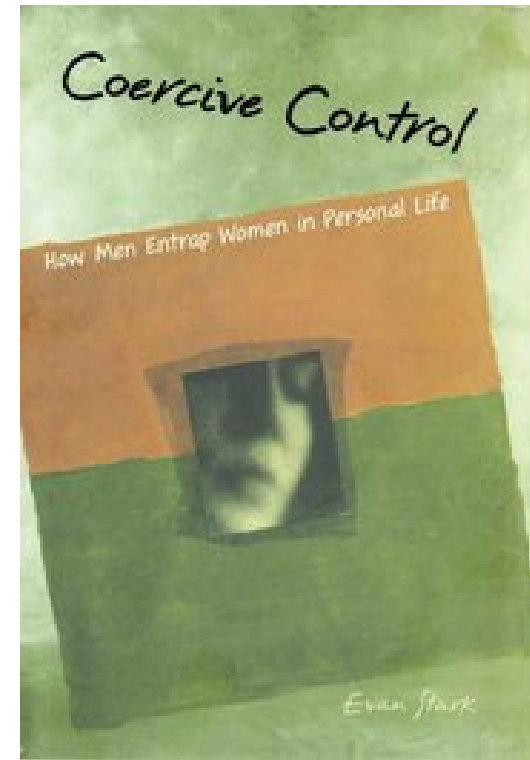
The severity of its  
impacts centers on  
the common  
operations of:

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Control  
Power  
Terror  
Threat  
Instilling of Fear



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Professor Evan Stark (2009), Rutgers University, 'Coercive Control'  
<https://youtu.be/NLIXXt6WNsM>

# Coercive control: The 'Panopticon Effect'

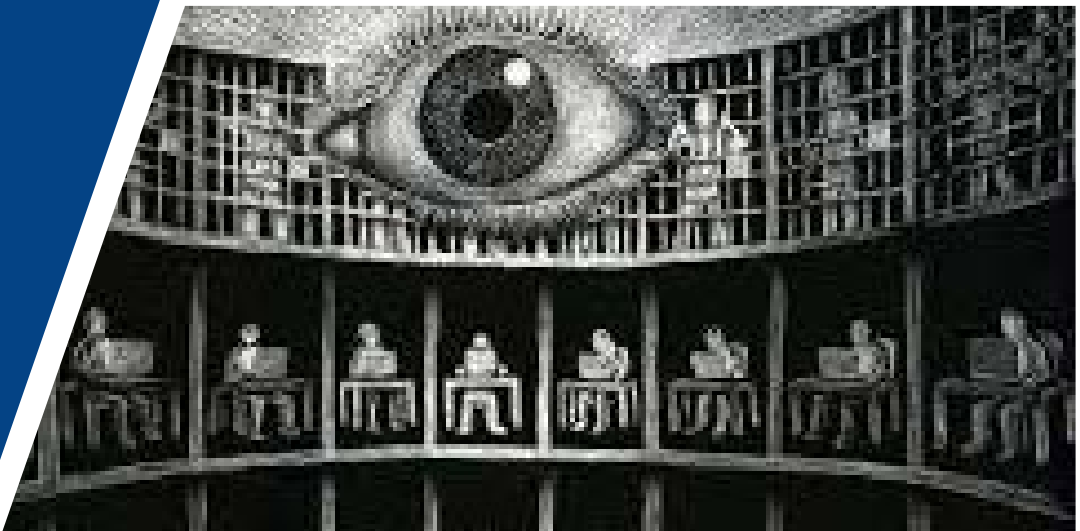
- Emotionally manipulating
- Stalking, tracking, tracing
- Pinching
- Surveilling through continuous texts or calls
- Limiting access to money, family, friends
- Internet shaming and social media monitoring
- Controlling movement ex: limiting time spent away from the house
- Isolating
- Humiliating
- Stealing the victim's identity, credit, or property
- Taunting and insulting
- Threatening

Look out for the 2018 upcoming book titled:

*The Panopticon Effect: The relationship between Gender and Coercive Control*

by Dr. Jamilla Rosdahl

- The theory of the 'Panopticon Effect' is discussed in detail in ch 1,2 of the book *The Panopticon Effect: The relationship between Gender and Coercive Control* Rosdahl, J. forthcoming 2018. An introduction to the theory also appears in Rosdahl, J 2016, *The Invisible Hold: Coercive Control as an Underlying Factor in DV*, SCEaT Workshop report 2B Brisbane: SCEaT.



# Gender and Coercive Control

- Gender is constructed and recreated by people within culture.
- The performance of gender conceals coercive control.
- Gender impacts on the form coercive control takes.
- Expressions linked to abuse by perpetrators are always, necessarily gendered

(from the discussion paper *Reflections on community attitudes to the 'cry for help' - who listens?* Rosdahl, 2016).



*I was successful, confident and had many friends. My children and I were very happy. We lived in a beautiful home in a nice, small town. From the day he came into my life, he had already decided he would never let me go. There were no bottles thrown around! No swearing! There were no signs of mental illness. He never punched me! And yet, he is the only man I am absolutely terrified of. I know if I had stayed with him, he would have killed me eventually. It was just a matter of time...it started off so small, it was all a performance in the beginning. He acted like the perfect family man at first then only in front of others. He carried himself well, he was well-spoken, well dressed, others spoke well about him. But then he started with...(pause) small pinches, then the continuous text messages to see where I was, what I was doing...He would say things like, 'message me to show me you're thinking of me', 'tell me something dirty'...or 'what are you doing now?'... At its worst, he would send me up to 30 messages a day... He became involved in every part of my life 24/7...*

(Laura, 2017).

For further information on techniques of coercive control see the article: '*Just wait until you get home whore: Gendered Partner Violence, Stalking and the Lasting Effects on Women Victims*  
Available at: [https://issuu.com/cdfvr/docs/qcdfvre\\_der\\_june\\_2017](https://issuu.com/cdfvr/docs/qcdfvre_der_june_2017)



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# The 'Jekyll and Hyde Effect'

- Perpetrators are very strategic, can appear smart and extremely charming
  - Men who abuse often have connections with law enforcements and other authorities to gain status from their community
  - Perpetrators imitate normative gender expressions to create the illusion of respectability
  - Men who abuse often draw on familiar gendered stories to lure victims in by telling emotional stories that are at odds with their own experiences
  - Perpetrators alienate their victims by gaining the trust of friends, family and institutional authorities and by making the victims appear unstable, emotional, untrustworthy, or irresponsible
  - The victim often falls pray to theft, vandalism and other menacing 'incidents', which appear coincidental but that are often the direct result from the perpetrator's intimate terrorism
  - The result of the perpetrator's destruction leaves the victim emotionally and economically vulnerable. This can create the effect that she appears 'troubled' or 'accident-prone' as painted by the perpetrator
- (Rosdahl, forthcoming 2018).



Look out for the upcoming webinar on *Gender, Performativity and Coercive Control* by Dr. Jamilla Rosdahl

# Dominant Masculinity

- Many abusers identify as male, heterosexual and white (Rosdahl, forthcoming 2018).
- Dominant norms surrounding heterosexual masculinity create specific ideas about what it means to be a 'man'.
- Beliefs linked to normative, stereotypical gender roles and masculinity are taken up and performed by perpetrators who identify as 'men' (Morriss, Rosdahl & Amaral, forthcoming 2018).



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*Nothing is what it seems:*

## The performance of being a 'man'

- Men who abuse use diverse strategies to present themselves as non-violent, capable, and rational 'men' (Fisher, 2014).
- 'The typical perpetrator looks "normal"' (Katz, 2016).
- Performances linked to masculinity often highlight and shore up culturally-specific, desirable 'masculine' identities which include confidence, charisma and assertiveness to mask coercive forms of abuse.
- As a perpetrator becomes more confident, the abuse and control increase and other, more complex, often dangerous behaviors are exercised (Rosdahl, forthcoming 2018).
- Some perpetrators are even able to express attitudes supportive of gender equality and respect for women while continuing to perpetrate control, harassment, bullying and abuse (Flood, 2016).

## Reflections from a Perpetrator

Dominant norms, behaviors and stereotypically gendered identities are regularly used by perpetrators to excuse, hide and promote violence against women:

*...no disrespect, but men raise their voices and use swear words, that seems part of our make-up. We don't realise that we do it. But like most Domestic Violence Orders that I know of outside the group that I'm in, a lot of them seem to be from females who are scared. So I've never hit my partner, ever. But... and I tried... and trying to tell them off, they see it as something different. That's why I'm in the situation I am in now (Pete, 2017).*

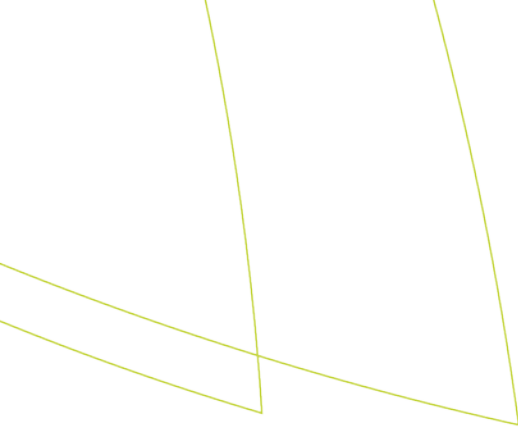
Excerpt from the study 'The Significance of Gendered Perceptions of Domestic Violence by Men in Perpetrator Intervention Programs', QCDFVR (Lovatt, Taylor and Rosdahl, forthcoming 2018).

# Masculinity and Violence

- Coercive abuse against women is more likely to occur in contexts where masculinity is culturally expressed through dominance and control (Katz, 2015).
- In cultures where masculine ideals involve physical violence, men are more likely to carry a sense of entitlement, value male status and power, display aggressiveness and repress or lack feelings linked to empathy and care.
- Men who express hostile and negative sexual attitudes toward women, who identify with traditional ideals of masculinity and male privilege and who believe in rape stereotypes, are more likely to sexually assault their partners, and not believe women who have been victims of abuse (Wegner, Abbey, Pierce, Pegram and Werner 2015).



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Violence associated with dominant masculinity  
is not used to express anger or frustration  
rather it's motivated by control (Katz, 2016).



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# Effects of long-term coercive control

- Isolation and helplessness in not being able to prevent the ongoing harassment, control or stalking
- Forced to change careers and homes
- An inability to trust others
- Financial instability due to expenses of increasing home and personal security



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***When we participate in normative gendered performances linked to masculinity and femininity, we support behaviors that encourage male dominance, power and control***

(Rosdahl, forthcoming 2018).





## **Dr. Jamilla Rosdahl**

Senior Research Officer

Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence  
Research

School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Sciences | Higher  
Education Division

CQUniversity Australia, Building 6, City Campus, Sydney  
Street, Mackay, Qld, 4740

Email [qcdfvronline@cqu.edu.au](mailto:qcdfvronline@cqu.edu.au)



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# Critical reflection

## *Questions to consider...*

- How does the community you are located in recognise and challenge normative gender roles?
- How does your organisation encourage a culture of gender equality?

Critical reflection questions adapted from the workbook and resources manual *Gender and Inclusive approaches to Peacebuilding* by Morriss, C. 2008.