

Framing the Issue

Domestic violence **OBJECTIFIES** survivors.

Abusers attempt to change people from
Subjects

(*people* who can act, make choices, experience reasonable consequences, reflect & act again)

into Objects

(*things* that do not act, but are only acted upon).

Surviving is all the ways that people resist this objectification. Some of the ways people resist are small, some are heroic. Some are lovely, some are ugly. We call people engaged in this process of survival: “Survivors”.

Some of the most basic theory building blocks include the following:

- **Clarifying Movement vs. Criminal Legal definitions**
- **Self-determination/Safety for survivors and Accountability for abusers**
 - **The order is important.**
 - **Self-determination is a necessary pre-condition for safety.** This is a closely held principle of democracy as well as a demonstrable experience in survivors’ lives. The very nature of domestic violence is taking power and control over another person’s life—undermining that person’s ability to be self-determining. Safety can only exist as a product of being in charge of oneself.
 - **Self-determination is the means, safety & empowerment are the ends. WAC 388-61A-0145:** The WAC definition of counseling based advocacy clearly states that an advocate’s role is to reinforce self-determination so that a survivor may increase their own safety and empowerment.
 - **Self-determination is the way that a person becomes “in charge of herself/himself”. It is the way a person becomes the subject of their own life again.** We all live our lives within a complex set of competing needs, obligations, desires, resources, skills and limitations. An advocate’s role is to help survivors build individual skills & information while working to address institutional barriers that undermine survivors’ ability to be in charge of themselves.
 - **What Survivors Do Matters!** What “happens to” survivors is important, but what survivors “do” is equally important. As advocates, we must be open to survivors’ full experiences.
- **Learning as you go: Do something** based on what you know, **reflect** on what happened, build a **new theory, do something** based on what you’ve learned. Repeat. (Praxis process) Change your model to reflect people’s experiences; do not edit people’s experiences to fit your model!
- **Values come out of work/anti-oppression based work**
 - **Being clear about our values is necessary** to evaluate our goals and outcomes. This clarity is respectful to people who are accessing support.
 - **Learning about institutional inequality & oppression**—people who batter rely on inequality and systems of oppression to establish and maintain abusive control. Understanding racism, disproportionate impact of criminalization to people of color, poverty, ableism, immigration laws, homophobia, etc is essential to everything from safety planning with individuals to making broad policy decisions.
 - **Acting to end institutional oppression**—for example: basic civil legal rights for LGBT people!