

# The Four Pillars That Support Domestic Violence

In our current society domestic violence is a widespread social problem with a disproportionately high rate of the violence perpetrated against women and children by men. Certain conditions<sup>1</sup> exist within a society that allow for one group of people to be consistently violent to another group of people. We call those conditions the four pillars. They exist in relation to violence against women, gays, lesbians and transgendered people, people of color, people with intellectual disabilities, undocumented immigrants and many other marginalized groups. Below are notes from the taped presentation.

The four pillars are;

## *1 The notion of hierarchy*

This idea states that some people are inherently better than others, more logical, more intelligent, more moral, more, more, more. Because they are better they should have positions of power in society and be in the position to rule the lesser. This idea of one group being better than another is constantly reinforced in our culture through the media, our laws, our schools, customs etc...

## *2 The ability to force those at the bottom of the hierarchy (pyramid) to submit*

Victims have to be conditioned as a group on some level to accept the domination, the right of the person at the top of the hierarchy to dominate and their own inferior position. Again this doesn't happen without tremendous social support from the media, the schools, the economic system, the law etc...

## *3 The objectification of those at the bottom of the hierarchy (pyramid)*

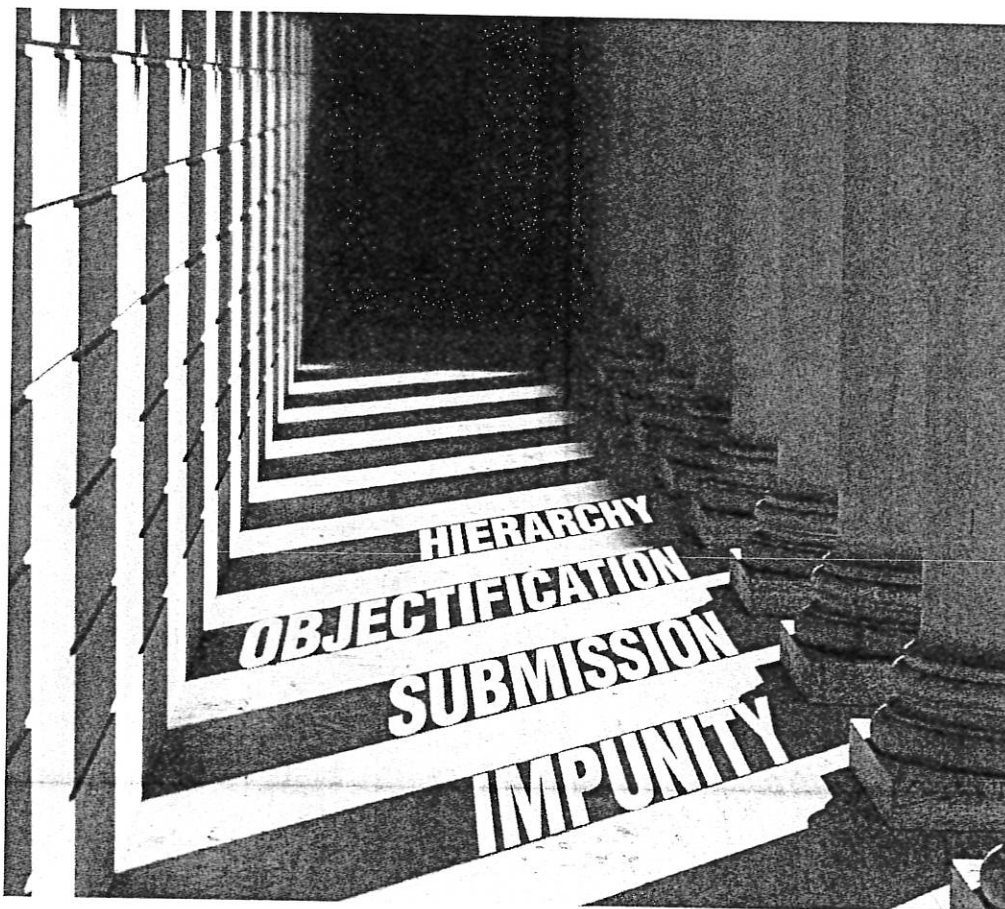
Just as there is a cultural and social way to get those at the bottom of this hierarchy (the pyramid) to submit to their inferior status there needs to be ways to make them into objects. In other words make people believe that they are not worthy, not normal, not good enough. So immigrants are branded as coming over the border to steal jobs, they are dirty and unreliable and ruining "our" economy. Gays are sinners who are somehow a flaw in God's creation. They will seduce people who don't want to be seduced; they are sick and need treatment or interventions to be changed etc....Women are manipulative, they take advantage of men, they are sexually unfaithful and can not be trusted around any other man, they are irrational and overly emotional and dependant. The people at the top of the hierarchy are also taught to think of people at the bottom this way.

## *4 The ability of those at the top of the hierarchy (pyramid) to use punishment violence or coercion without consequences*

For centuries men have been allowed to batter their wives with no interference from the police or family or the church. All of that is beginning to change but very slowly and unevenly. The laws prohibiting "wife beating" are enforced unevenly from city to city and even within cities and towns. It is now illegal to hit an adult partner in all fifty states and will often be punished on some level by the state. It is still common for the faith community and families and people in the mental health community to look the other way when this violence is occurring and not confront the abuser.

<sup>1</sup> Ellen Pence, "Theory Matters- Different Theories Produce Different Results" Based on the work of Andrea Dworkin

*All four of these pillars must come down for the widespread use of violence by one group against another to be eliminated.*



## The Four Pillars That Support Violence<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>“Whenever there is widespread use of violence in society by one group against another (whites against people of color, heterosexuals against BLGT people, men against women, citizens against undocumented workers) there are four core pillars allowing that violence to remain in place. Weaken one pillar and you’ve weakened them all.” Keynote address by Dr. Ellen Pence, NCCADV Biennial Conference, Raleigh, NC May 22nd, 2008

# Domestic Violence TURNING POINTS

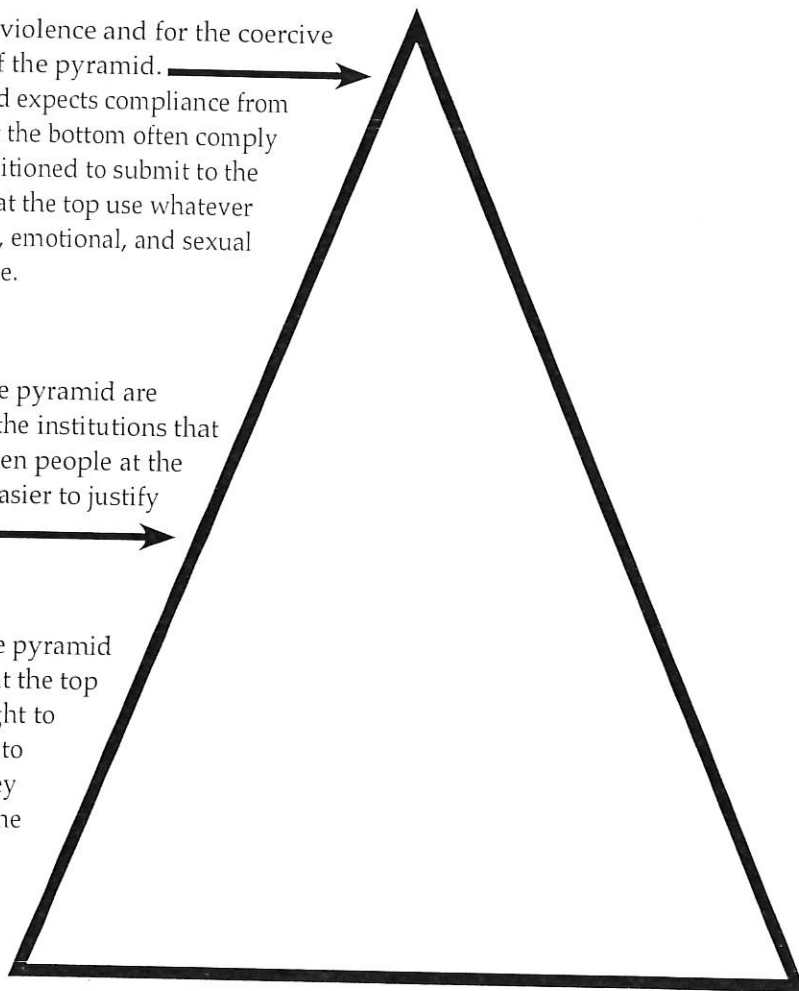


## Characteristics of Relationships Where Coercive Controlling Domestic Violence (Battering) is Occurring

There is no accountability for the violence and for the coercive actions used by those at the top of the pyramid. The person at the top of the pyramid expects compliance from everyone below them, but people at the bottom often comply without force because they are conditioned to submit to the authority of those at the top. Those at the top use whatever means necessary including physical, emotional, and sexual violence to keep people in their place.

People who are not at the top of the pyramid are objectified by those at the top and the institutions that hold up the society (structure). When people at the bottom are made into objects it is easier to justify the use of violence against them.

People who are at the bottom of the pyramid are forced to submit to the people at the top of the pyramid. Often they are taught to believe it is their role and lot in life to submit to the people at the top. They are conditioned by society and by the people at the top of the pyramid to know if they step out of their role there will be some kind of punishment.



# Characteristics and The Four Pillars

Below is a list of quotes from Ellen's talk. *Your small group will be assigned two quotes, pick one to discuss in your group. After 5-8 minutes your group will report on one insight you got from your discussion.*

## Hierarchy

- The abuser has an enormous sense of entitlement; he belongs at the top.
- The abuser feels entitled to a certain level of subservience from his partner. He comes to believe that if he has explained his position and it is logical and clear she should agree with him and if she doesn't he sees her as "illogical" or "crazy".
- Once the abuser labels his partner as illogical, crazy, or an addict, he sets himself apart from her as the healthy one and society typically backs up his thinking. The psychologist she is sent to often views her behaviors as personality disorders or active forms of mental illness. For example, women's outbursts of aggression often earn them the label of being bipolar and they are often put on medication. The violence she is experiencing is no longer named as the problem, her "illness" is.
- After the abuser sets himself apart from his partner and sees himself as the healthy one and her as the sick one, the abuser typically experiences himself as a victim of the woman he is abusing. He comes to believe that he would not have to hurt her if she were not so "crazy".

## Objectifying

- Typically, when men enter into a relationship, they admire aspects of the woman they are with. When the battering begins there is less admiring and much more judgments of her, you are too fat, too sloppy, too lazy and so on. He does not batter the person he loves, he batters the person he has objectified. He makes her into an object as a means to justify his violence against her. He doesn't hit "Monica" or "Shelly", he hits the whore, the slut, or the bitch.
- The objectification of women, turning them into something less than human, rationalizes the widespread use of violence against women. This is a universal problem. Men, all over the world, say the same things about the women they are battering, "she is a whore, slut,

erratic, out of control, fat, ugly, and out to get men.” Men come to believe the labels they give women and women become less than human; they become objects; meaning they are beatable..

- Abusers set themselves apart from their victim and come to believe that she is not worthy of respect.
- The abuser doesn't punch a partner but the object he or she has created.
- Women come into relationships pre-objectified. This means that we live in a world that is continually making women into to objects. Individual men didn't come up with this on their own. They learned it from the culture they grew up in and live in.

### **Forced submission**

- Victims are forced to submit. For example, when women are being battered they feel guilty, they believe they are the problem. If they only made him feel more secure he wouldn't have to batter me. They feel guilty about the possibility of the relationship not working out, they feel guilty about the impact the battering has on their children. This is a socialized guilt. Women are trained to believe it is their responsibility to take care of the person battering them- it is their lot in life. Women who are being battered are entrapped in the relationship.
- Many victims of battering are on drugs and diagnosed as mentally ill. The batterer isn't diagnosed this way. I've always thought we should give the women's drugs to the men.
- At the same time women always resist the oppression and violence in their lives.

### **Violence with impunity**

- When aggression and violence is used without consequences, the dominator continues to use violence.
- The more an abuser gets away with the violence, the bolder he becomes in his continued use of violence.
- If you are at the top of the pyramid you typically can use violence and not feel pressure to stop.