

UNPACKING PATRIARCHY [2 HOURS]

OVERVIEW

This workshop explores **patriarchy** and **misogyny** and the different ways they manifest inside all of us in this time.

GOALS

- To clarify what patriarchy and misogyny are
- To explore the ways patriarchy manifests in all of us, even across our different experiences
- To identify some of the antidotes to patriarchy and provide a structured way to cleanse ourselves

TIME NEEDED

2 hours, depending on size of group

MATERIALS NEEDED

Flip chart, tape, markers, materials for rinsing (pitcher or bowl, water, essential oils, etc.) & Darnell Moore excerpt

FRAMING: On a flip chart, write up all or parts of the definitions of **patriarchy** and **misogyny**.

One working definition of **PATRIARCHY** is **a social system in which men hold primary power** and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. Patriarchy is associated with a set of ideas – a patriarchal ideology – that acts to explain and justify this dominance. It can be understood as **a system for splitting every aspect of reality, including people, into two groups – masculine and feminine – and then assigning value and priority to the masculine while relegating the feminine to a secondary, submissive, or even shameful status.** Any person that threatens this binary, dominant/submissive division – including but not limited to trans and gender nonconforming people and queer people – are a threat to heteropatriarchal ideology and may be targeted by violence within it.

MISOGYNY is **the hatred of, contempt for, or entrenched prejudice against women, girls, and all feminized people within patriarchy.** Misogyny functions as an ideology or belief system that has accompanied patriarchal societies for thousands of years, and continues to place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision-making.

Patriarchy and misogyny are part of the core ideology of domination that feeds other systems of oppression, including white supremacy, colonialism, homophobia, classism, and ableism.

WHY IT MATTERS

Patriarchy is important to engage and understand in this time because:

- **Patriarchy is not only about sexism; it is about paternalism.** In the case of those exercising internalized masculine superiority, this may look like acting as though you know what's best for others (with the logic that they are weak, so you must control them). For those internalizing feminized inferiority, this may mean believing that you are helpless and that someone else knows what's best for you (with the logic that you are weak, so you need them to control you or save you). It boils down to a mutual agreement that 'white daddy knows best,' and may masquerade as caretaking or helping. As we work to dismantle the paternalism of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism, we must be simultaneously vigilant for patriarchal paternalism.
- **People of all genders can exhibit a wide spectrum of patriarchal behaviors** and do so in our communities every day (and on national public stages). A nuanced understanding of patriarchy allows us to move collectively beyond tokenism and simple binaries (men: bad; women: good) to celebrate those who threaten patriarchy from every body, every identity, and every social position.
- **Our survival and that of the planet actually depend on freeing ourselves from the 'white daddy knows best' mentality, because no one is coming to save us.** This means that, for many of us socialized as women, we have to overcome this patriarchal sense of inferiority that assigns us (especially those of us marginalized in other ways) to the quiet back row in the theater of our own lives. At the same time, we know that overcoming that paradigm could make us individualistic, which would simply recreate patriarchy in another form. **We need to resist this!**

Ask in pairs or triads:

- *How have you seen this play out in your own life?*
- *How have you or others **exerted** patriarchal control?*
- *How have you seen yourself or others **bending to (or embracing)** the patriarchal control of others?*

Big group discussion:

- *How has patriarchy and the impact of patriarchy **played out in our lives?***
- *What has **shifted or loosened its grip** inside us? Put another way, **where is it coming undone within us?***
- *What is the **feminism we need to build** in order to contend with patriarchy?*

Consider: Where patriarchy teaches ...

- ... individualism and celebrity activism ... **we need collaborative leadership**
 - ... stoic and rugged individualism ... **we need interdependence**
 - ... posturing ... **we need authenticity**
 - ... false strength ... **we need vulnerability**
 - ... foregone conclusions ... **we need aspirations and hope.**
- *What else?* Recap key points from the conversation, then move the group toward close.

CLOSING EXERCISE: "I'm gonna wash that man right out of my hair"

Rinse yourself clean: Tailor this exercise to your group, but it is okay if it makes some people uncomfortable. **Create a space for people to energetically wash off the patriarchy.** This can look like everyone standing in a circle with a bowl and pitcher, and each person's neighbor holding the bowl and helping pour water over their neighbor's hands. It can be a station people visit in pairs and wash each other's hands. It can be a foot washing station where people soak their feet in warm and soapy water and then the other person dries them. It can be making wands and people banishing the patriarchy. It depends on the contours and dynamics of your group. But the goal is to have people work together intimately to bear witness and help each other get clean.

Optional: Incorporate any number of Theater of the Oppressed exercises in this workshop, for exploring where patriarchy manifests and the feminism we need. At the end of this conversation (or before the "What is the feminism we need to build?" portion), some groups may want to revisit the 3 I's exercise and work through it together, specifically focusing on patriarchy, and then finally run the 3 I's exercise looking at the inverse of patriarchy, aka feminism.

Final optional exercise: have people read and reflect on the following excerpt from Darnell Moore's memoir *No Ashes in the Fire*:

"All boys are taught that the world is theirs. But black boys learn early on that the world they are required to rule is the home - the place often sustained by the visible and invisible labor of black women and girls we share homes and relationships with. The home is likened to a kingdom black boys are expected to provide for, fight to protect, and lord over. Outside the home, the streets black boys navigate are controlled by the state and the wealthy and black boys' freedoms are restricted and policed.

White boys are raised to rule the home, the streets, the banks, the courts, the legislative halls, the church, the academy, the medical industry, the military, and the country. They are granted permission to travel through the world never questioning their need to control others' bodies and properties, never reflecting on their incessant demand for respect and entitlement, never removing themselves from the center of the public imagination. Black boys are taught to replicate the white boy game, but eventually they realize the game was never in their favor ... I wounded myself not realizing that patriarchy - male dominance - takes aim at girls and women and the humanity of men, too." (*No Ashes in the Fire*, p. 160)