

# CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY AND SEXISM

RESOURCE PACKET BY AORTA, JUNE 2017

## MAPPING PATRIARCHY: LEVELS

### INDIVIDUAL

The individual level refers to the words, actions, behaviors, and beliefs of individual people. We often have a tendency to minimize sexism as something that happens at only an individual level, ignoring the systemic and cultural layers. Often, when our own words, actions, etc are guided and influenced by sexism, we have a very hard time seeing this (especially when we feel we are well intended). This means we have a duty to take it seriously when others do us the favor of helping us see and understand how our actions may be harmful. Below are some examples of how patriarchy can manifest on an individual level:

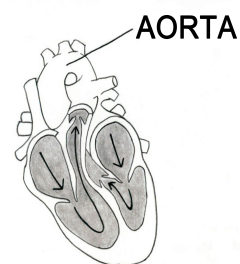
- Street harassment of women and feminine-presenting people.
- Using words like “bitch,” “girls,” “pussy,” in a way that equates femininity with weakness or wrongness.
- Misogynist jokes (“dumb blonds”, rape jokes, “my wife is a nag”, etc.)
- A feminine person being made to feel afraid of wearing feminine clothes or showing skin, and instead feeling a need to wear more masculine clothes in order to gain respect or avoid harassment.
- A masculine person interrupting a feminine person while they are speaking.
- Parents or teachers policing children’s gender expression: “boys don’t cry,” “girls don’t get dirty,” “toughen up,” “don’t play with that truck, doll, etc.” (This is often based in fear/wanting children to be safe from bullying and attacks).

### INSTITUTIONAL

Institutions are neither good nor bad; they just are. Institutions are things like: the government, corporations, social justice nonprofits, cooperatives, families, and places of worship. This level refers to the ways that institutions maintain patriarchy. Examples of this can be conscious: intentional policies, laws, actions (which is what we often think about). Also included in the institutional level are the results of the default patterns and ways that institutions operate. These are usually unconscious, and are no less powerful or impactful.

Institutions often work as strong forces in socializing individuals. Institutions are also made of individuals, and so can be shaped and transformed by us. Institutions both help to create cultural values and stories, and are influenced by them. Below are some examples of how patriarchy manifests institutionally/systemically:

- Bathrooms are gender segregated in most buildings, forcing trans and gender nonconforming people to choose which one to use, and putting them at risk for harassment, violence, and assault.

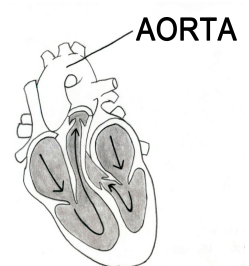


- Women still earn approximately 79 cents to men's dollar. (Black women, on average, earn 60 cents to every white man's dollar, based on census data.)
- Caretaking work, most often relegated to women, is under-recognized and undervalued. This includes caring for children, elders, and the household as well as workplace roles such as taking notes in meetings, recognizing and appreciating others' labor, clean up, etc.
- Many school dress codes enforce gender-specific policies that place the blame on girls for "distracting" other students by showing arms, shoulders, knees, midriffs, etc.
- Masculine voices dominating in meetings in terms of time, volume, higher esteem.
- Women and trans people often do unrecognized, undervalued work, taking notes in meetings, taking care of others, getting food and drinks.
- Globally, men dominate well-esteemed and well-paid industries (science, political leaderships) and in the U.S. women earn approximately 75% of what men earn in a lifetime.

## CULTURAL

The cultural level refers to dominant cultural stories and values that allow patriarchy to exist without great public outrage. These are usually values and stories that we do not want to personally hold. However, they are also the values and stories that we were socialized into, and that are the underlying messages we receive via sources like the news, media, movies, interpersonal interactions, etc. It can be helpful for us to identify them so that we can interrogate how our personal actions are influenced by these stories and values. Importantly, while culture influences institutions and individuals, institutions and individuals also create and transform cultural stories. Below are some examples of cultural manifestations of patriarchy.

- Media that portrays women as primarily sexual objects.
- Cultural stories that portray men as more competent, "natural" leaders, stronger and smarter than women, invulnerable, more deserving of power, etc. Cultural stories that portray men as emotionally stunted, easy to anger, aggressive, "think with their penis", etc.
- The myth that normative gender roles are "natural", or that they are static and have been/will be the same over time and across cultures.
- The myth of the gender binary: that a binary exists (girl/boy, woman/man), as well as the cultural commitment to upholding it.
- The cultural myth that gender and physical anatomy are one and the same.
- Cultural and historical narratives that either portray trans, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people as anomalies or "freaks" to be publicly displayed, or completely erase trans, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people from history.



# THE PILLARS OF PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and trans people, and the extension of male dominance over women and trans folks in society in general. Unlike sexism, the word “patriarchy” names the social power dynamic involved.

Male supremacy is the underlying value. Sexism is the everyday occurrence

Patriarchy is supported by the following intersecting systems, or “pillars”:

**Gender Binary:** A system that defines and makes room for two and only two distinct, natural, and opposite genders (i.e., male and female). These two genders are defined in opposition to each other, such that masculinity and femininity are seen as mutually exclusive. In this system, there is no room for any ambiguity or intermingling of gender traits.

**Misogyny:** The hatred of women, girls, and femininity. This manifests in many ways, such as violence against women, violence against feminine men, rape culture, the devaluing of traditionally feminized work, etc.

**Heterosexism:** The idea that heterosexuality and only heterosexuality is natural, normal, superior, and required. This can refer to any institution or belief system that excludes or makes invisible questioning, lesbian, non-labeling, bisexual, transgender, queer, and gay people, as well as any system that constructs queer sexualities as deviant, wrong, or immoral.

Heterosexism is deeply rooted in the culture and institutions in our society. Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia all stem from and are supported by heterosexism. Heterosexism enforces and is enforced by a binary gender system.

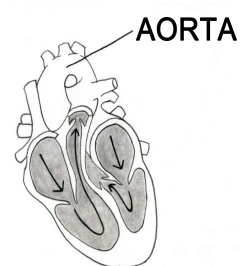
**White Supremacy.** A historically-based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege (*From the Challenging White Supremacy Project, San Francisco*).

**Capitalism:** An economic and social system in which the means of production are largely in private or corporate hands, and the main incentive of economic activity is the accumulation of profits. This often results in class divisions, and exploitation of workers for the purposes of increasing profits.

## Reflection Questions

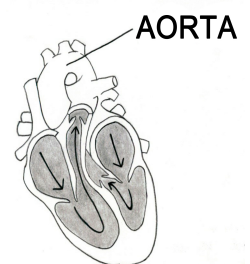
How do these pillars support and uphold male supremacy?

How do they work together to do this?



## AFFIRMATIONS FOR BEING A MALE ALLY

- I understand that the empowerment of women, trans people, and gender nonconforming people does not threaten my strength as a man.
- I am willing and able to call other men out on their actions, words, and issues.
- I model positive behavior for my friends and other men by setting an example.
- I practice listening to women and trans people and their realities without trying to fix the problem myself.
- I work on coming to a place where I am not struggling with my manhood, and do not need to prove my masculinity to others.
- I am present at meetings to make sure male privilege and gender oppression are part of the discussion.
- I demonstrate knowledge and awareness of the issues of gender oppression.
- I use the language and political worldview of gender equality.
- I continually educate others and myself about gender oppression.
- I recognize my own limitations as a male identified person doing anti-sexist work.
- I raise issues about gender oppression over and over, both in public and in private.
- I can identify male supremacy and gender oppression as it is happening.
- I can strategize and work in coalition with others to advance anti-sexist work.
- I support and validate the comments and actions of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people and other allies (but not in a paternalistic manner).
- I strive to share power with women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.
- I take a personal interest in the lives and welfare of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.
- I listen carefully so that I am more likely to understand the needs of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.
- I can imagine and articulate the point of view of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people when it may be helpful.
- I can accept and encourage leadership from women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.
- I understand that women, trans, and gender non-conforming people often have valid experiences that cause them to feel distrustful, wary, or angry with men and masculine-gendered people. I do not take it as a personal attack. Nor do I try to make them feel guilty for feeling these things. I remember that it's not all about me.
- I recognize that patriarchy has created a lot of internalized oppression in women, trans, and gender non-conforming people. Even if they express sexist views, I realize it does not make it all right for me to act in a sexist way.
- I recognize that patriarchy and male privilege also involve domination and oppression of children. I know that being a male ally applies to children as well, because young children often suffer their first experiences of oppression due to patriarchal dominance in households.
- I realize that men also experience patriarchal violence, including sexual assault. I know that being a male ally means recognizing the oppression that men perpetrate on others, including other men.



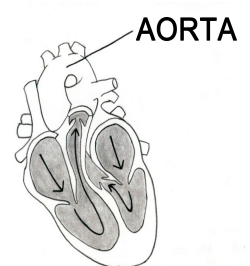
# RED FLAGS AND INDICATORS

Below are some common ways that patriarchy and male supremacy show up in workplaces and organizations:

- policies and bylaws that use gender binary language (he/she) rather than gender neutral pronouns (they/them)
- office space has gender segregated bathrooms
- leadership or public face of the organization is disproportionately male
- masculine voices dominate at meetings
- masculine opinions are held in higher esteem
- men feel more entitled to propose changes to policies or practices in order to get their needs met
- higher turnover of women and trans people
- women and trans people do the majority of the unrecognized and undervalued work: taking notes, cleaning, answering the phones, taking care of co-workers, recognizing and appreciating people's work
- masculine people restating words, statements, ideas of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people in meetings, or not listening to what women, trans, and gender non-conforming people are saying

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Who are the faces of the leaders of the organization? How did they get there?
- Who do people go to get questions answered?
- Who are the 'experts'?
- Who holds the power in the organization? Whose opinions and voices matter most?
- What are the assumptions of needs of folks in the space?
- What is the division of labor in the organization?
- What types of knowledge and skills are valued? Which are not valued?
- Are there types of work that are unpaid? What types are they?
- What language is used around sexuality?
- How is gender identity talked about and addressed?



## TACTICS FOR INTERRUPTING AND CHANGE MAKING

Below are some recommendations for addressing patriarchy and other systems of oppression in organizations and workplaces:

### **EXIT SURVEYS**

High turnover is usually a red flag that there's something going on within the organization that's leading people to feel unsatisfied, uncomfortable, or unwilling to stay with the organization. This can be structural, interpersonal, or both. When this turnover is greater in some groups of people (women, people of color) than others, that's an even more sure sign that there's something the group needs to address. Be sure to capture why people are leaving the organization. Collect exit surveys from all members that leave the organization, to help capture the factors contributing to people's decisions to leave. You can even contact folks who have been gone from the organization for a while to see if they'd be willing to offer input retroactively.

People are often more willing/able to be honest about their decisions and the factors contributing to them after they've left the organization, when they have fewer concerns about how their honesty will impact their job stability, pay, or social relationships. So, it can be helpful to ask people for this information after they've left.

### **ONGOING INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EDUCATION**

Offer educational opportunities for the whole group, to catalyze discussion, build trust, and facilitate ongoing conversations with the membership. Also, be sure to remember that the work is not the workshop—you can't solve systemic oppression by throwing a workshop at it. A good workshop will leave your organization with a better understanding of the work you need to be doing to better address systemic power dynamics. It should leave you with a long list of work to do!

### **CLEARLY DEFINE ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS.**

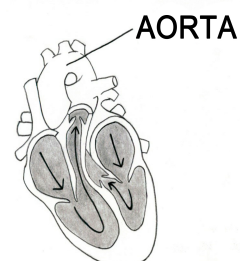
Ensure all jobs (especially ones that often get overlooked and then pushed to women, such as note taking, cleaning, phone answering, etc) are included and accounted for and assigned. They can be assigned to one job role, or they can intentionally be rotated between all workers or groups of workers.

### **DEVELOP POLICIES FOR ADDRESSING CONFLICT, TENSION, AND HURTFUL BEHAVIOR.**

You don't want to be doing this during a flare-up, when any policies or practices you adopt can feel very personal to whoever is involved in the current conflict. As a group, decide how you want to address these moments, when/where you want to address them (in meetings, through a specific committee, one on one), and by whom you want them to be addressed. Note that conflict, tension, and hurtful behavior are slightly different and you may want to choose to address them differently.

### **IDENTIFY, ENCOURAGE, AND INTENTIONALLY DEVELOP LEADERSHIP, ESPECIALLY AMONG PEOPLE FROM MARGINALIZED GROUPS.**

Being surrounded by the values of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and ableism, it's very easy to internalize these values, even when they are hurtful to you. For this reason, people of color, women, trans and gender non-conforming people, poor people, disabled people may not recognize their own leadership skills, or strengths, even though they may seem very apparent to you. When building leadership, don't just leave people to self-identify and step up into roles by their own volition. When you do, you will be more likely to get folks who feel comfortable in leadership or entitled to leadership



positions. Take a moment as an organization to identify where, and kinds of leadership, you see in the organization.

Also, intentionally build and develop leadership in your organization. Ways to do this:

- **Mentorship:** working in teams or pairs, buddies, experienced leaders exercise restraint and train others, make space for potential leaders to ask the group or individuals for assistance and feedback.
- **Skill-building**
  - Have a budget for professional development
  - Cross training
  - Pairing
  - Rotation of tasks
  - Mentorship
  - Breaking down skills rather than just doing them
- Education (particularly for democratic organizations)
  - Make sure everyone one know how the organization is structured, and how to bring up proposals and change things
  - Robust orientation to organizational structure
  - Develop manuals, written materials to refer to
  - Power: democratic decision-making is not about getting your way; it's about thinking together and coming up with the best decision for the group. It's about compromise.
  - We're living in capitalism. People come in and they don't know how to participate within a democracy. Ongoing education, and economic study can help the whole group function better.

## RESOURCES

[Going Places that Scare Me: Reflections on Male Privilege](#) by Chris Crass

*“Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing”* by Andrea Smith (find it in [Color of Violence: the INCITE! Anthology](#))

[Love and Struggle: My Life in the SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond](#) by David Gilbert

[Towards Collective Liberation](#) by Chris Crass

[Transforming a Rape Culture](#) ed. Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth

[Yes Means Yes!: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape](#) ed. Jaclyn Freidman & Jessica Valenti

