a handbook on

understanding patriarchy

the red elephant foundation

what is patriarchy?

patriarchy, in simple terms, refers to the domination of men.

the now understood meaning of term derives from the anthropological meaning of the word, which was, the rule of the father.

patriarchy, as it operates, refers to male dominance over all other gender identities.
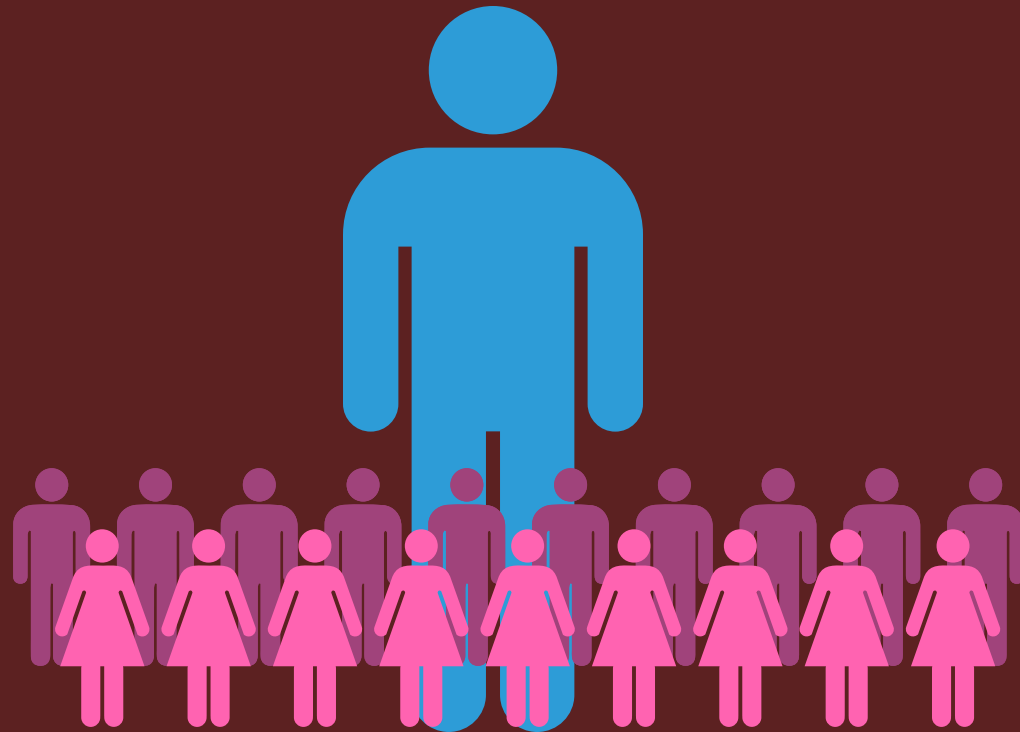
what is patriarchy?

most shared gendered experiences among women and non-male gender identities center around being subordinated to men in one way or the other.

that subordination looks like child marriage, forced marriage, FGM, unequal pay for equal work, deprivation of education, marital rape, non-sharing of household responsibilities, among other things.
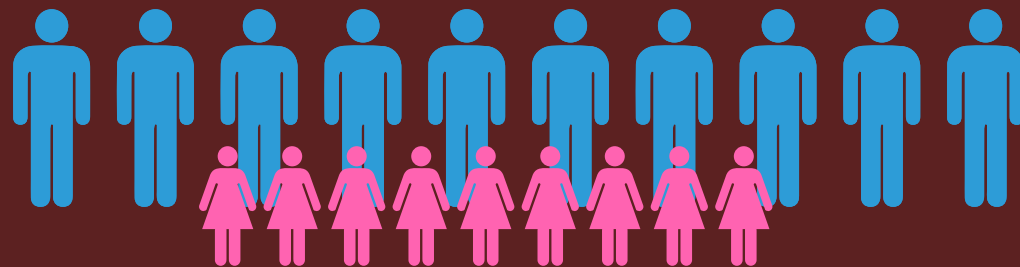
what is patriarchy?

because of years of male dominance over other gender identities, the phenomenon of male dominance has become normalized, into a system of sorts.

what is patriarchy?

patriarchy manifests as male control over:
- family (decision-making and power)
- religion (created, interpreted and controlled by men)
- education (controlled, administered by men)
- legal system (laws created and implemented by men)
- political system (led and controlled by men)
- cultural norms and traditional norms

patriarchy is a form of structural violence.

in the words of johan galtung, the father of peace education, structural violence is a form of violence where a social structure or institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.

patriarchy is a mindset and a system that props up outright gender-based and sexual violence. it serves as the background, if you will. although structural violence is said to be invisible, its impacts are tangible.

patriarchy is a form of structural violence.

patriarchy has taken roots as a norm of sorts, to the point that we have internalized it thus. take for example those "wife jokes" you read around you. or even the way our movies are made centered around men. think about how women are portrayed in the media, how men are portrayed in the media and how all other gender identities are virtually non-existent in mainstream media.

yup. patriarchy in action, all of it.

patriarchy is intersectional, too

patriarchy is not a constant everywhere in the way it manifests. the core principle of male dominance remains the same, but intersectionality and time changes the way in which it manifests.
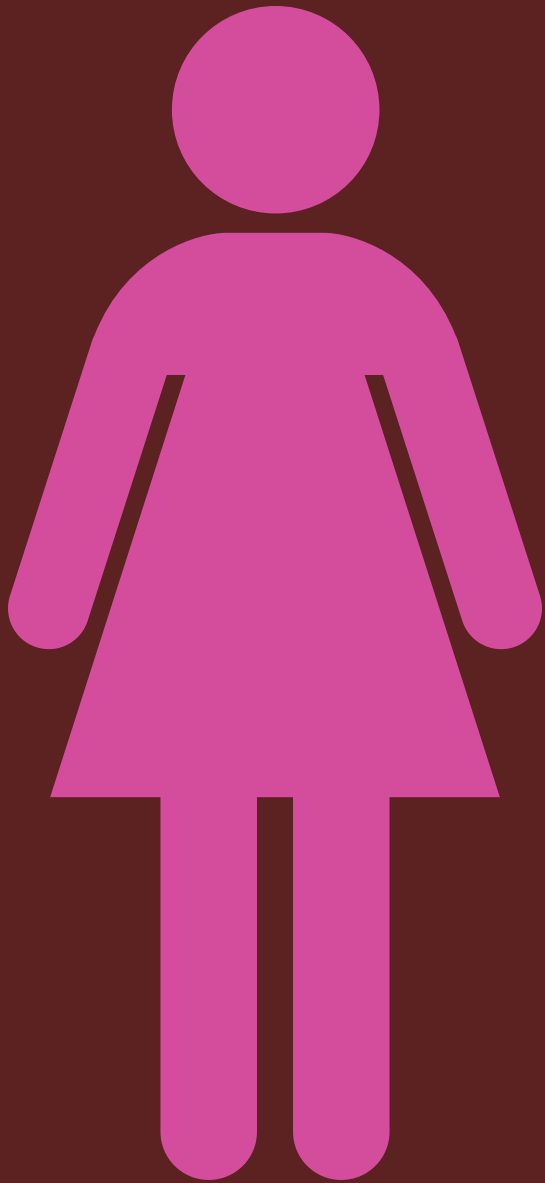
we each experience patriarchy in different ways, although the common denominator remains male dominance.

the impacts of patriarchy

most people assume that patriarchy affects only women, adversely. it's important to remember that women can also be carriers of patriarchy - for instance, the mother who tells her daughter to dress "appropriately" but says nothing to her son when he mistreats women.

the truth is, patriarchy adversely affects all gender identities - male, too, albeit at a lesser degree. let's look at how it operates.
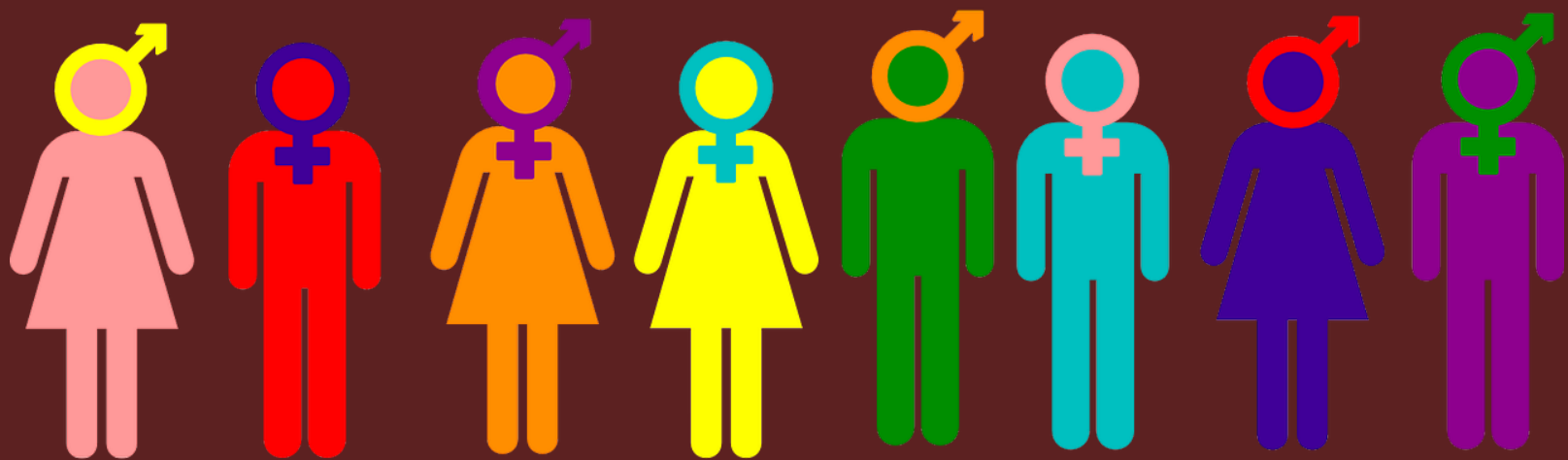
the impacts of patriarchy

patriarchy affects women significantly. because people believe that gender is a binary, they see women to be the "opposite" of men, and therefore, women become the immediate subjects of male dominance.

women are often treated as less important in comparison to men. they face violence, deprivation, discrimination and exclusion because of their identity as women.
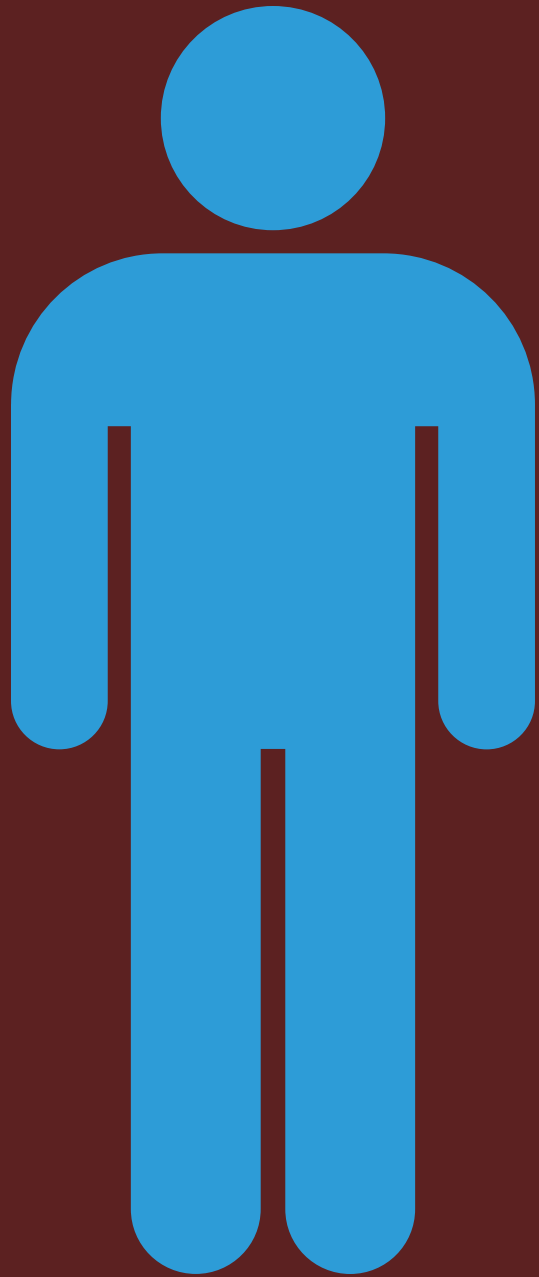
the impacts of patriarchy

patriarchy affects non-male gender identities, too. again, because people believe that gender is a binary, they see women to be the "opposite" of men, and therefore, other gender identities are not even given any place be it in discourse, or in society.

And so, they face erasure, outright violence, exclusion, discrimination and disrespect.

the impacts of patriarchy

patriarchy affects men, too. it imposes upon them a notion of masculinity that they are expected to conform to. they are expected to conform to ideals such as "men don't cry" and "men must be breadwinners."

it also presupposes gender roles - a man can't do housework or be a stay-at-home husband / father, per patriarchy's norms.

feminism: countering patriarchy

feminism is equality, and is the opposite of patriarchy. it is called feminism because women need to be put back in to the equation of equality and restore the balance, simply because the structural violence of patriarchy started with the dominance of man over women.

when patriarchy subverted equality, the male was dominant, and the female was subjugated. but gender being fluid, allows for more gender identities than the binary. this fluidity was not considered "normal" or "acceptable" for the dominant to identify as the subjugated.

feminism: countering patriarchy

so, feminising the rhetoric by putting women back into the dialogue will lead to creating an equal space where none is seen as the dominant or the subjugated, and therefore, fluidity will not be an anomaly.

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feminism: countering patriarchy

feminism creates place for everyone, and respects all genders equally. it puts women and all other genders back into the rhetoric and creates a balance that pivots on equality, respect and empathy.