

## The Impact of Patriarchal Practices on Cassie Hanwell in *Things You Save in a Fire*

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### Abstract

This research examined a literary work titled *Things You Save in a Fire*, written by Katherine Center. The novel tells the story of a female firefighter named Cassie Hanwell who faces sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination. There were two research questions addressed in this study. The first question aimed to find the depiction of patriarchal practices in the novel, namely the sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination experienced by Cassie Hanwell. The second question examined the impact of sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination on Cassie Hanwell. This literary analysis applied a qualitative research approach by selecting and grouping the data for analysis. To answer the two research questions, theories of patriarchy, feminism, character, and characterization were applied. The data sources were books and journal articles. The results of the study showed the impact of patriarchal practices on Cassie Hanwell. After the sexual assault and gender discrimination at the workplace, Cassie becomes lonesome and skeptical. She also turns into a paranoid and aggressive person and suppresses her feelings.

*Keywords:* patriarchy, feminism, sexual assault, gender discrimination, characterization

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## **The Impact of Patriarchal Practices on Cassie Hanwell in *Things You Save in a Fire***

### **Introduction**

The belief that women are inferior to men can be found in a patriarchal society. Patriarchy gains power from men having greater access to, and the meditation of, the resources and rewards of authority structures both inside and outside the home (Humm, 1992). As a consequence, women are suppressed by society economically, politically, sexually, and psychologically. In the novel *Things You Save in a Fire*, Cassie Hanwell, the main character, becomes a sexual assault victim at the age of 16. She is sexually assaulted by a high school crush, Heath Thompson. Ten years later, she has to face the exact same sexual assault perpetrator and is once again sexually assaulted. Despite the negative impact that Cassie experiences after the sexual assault, the perpetrator is not punished for his actions. In fact, Cassie becomes the one who has to pay for her action because she attacks her assailant during the assault. Her job as a female firefighter is at risk, which makes her move to another fire station. In her new workplace, she is the only female firefighter. Cassie has to struggle at her workplace as she is discriminated against by her male co-workers.

According to National Sexual Violence Research Center (2018), in the U.S., 43.6% of women (nearly 52.2 million) experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. Besides sexual assault, women are also disadvantaged in terms of employment. There is a concerning gap between women and men in terms of work participation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Force Statistics (2019), 57.1% of women participated in the labor force, compared to 69.1% of men. This similar condition can also be found in the Indonesian context. Violence against women increases from time to time. The increase of this violence was almost eightfold in the span of 12 years (Komnas Perempuan, 2020). Of the total reported cases of sexual violence in the private sphere, rape ranked as the second highest form of sexual violence, and the majority of perpetrators were the victim's romantic partner. These victims of sexual violence have to face numerous mental problems. In most cases, a victim of

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sexual violence might face isolation, inability to function in society, emotional responses, fear, anxiety, and anguish (Josse, 2010).

According to KemenPPPA (2019), the work participation gap between women and men was around 30.81% in Indonesia. There were 51.88% of women in the productive age group who were working, while 82.69% of men were working. As stated by Rafail Walangitan, deputy assistant of Kemen PPPA Woman Rights Protection in the workplace, there has been injustice faced by women in the workplace in the areas of job recruitment, opportunities to receive training and promotion, participation in decision-making, retirement age difference, and termination of employment. Noticing the prevalent issues of sexual assault and gender-based discrimination. The researcher decided to study a work of literature that raised similar issues. The novel analyzed in this study was *Things You Save in a Fire* by Katherine Center (2019).

The first research question of this study aimed to find the patriarchal practices in the novel. The second research question intended to find the impact of the patriarchal practices on Cassie Hanwell. The findings were expected to increase the readers' awareness of the negative impact of patriarchal practices on women and the practices of patriarchy that exist in Indonesia. As awareness grows, patriarchal practices, particularly sexual assault, and workplace gender discrimination can be prevented.

### **Literature Review**

As this study aimed to find how patriarchal practices were depicted and what their impact on Cassie Hanwell was, the theories of patriarchy, feminism, character, and characterization were implemented. The patriarchy and feminism theories aided the analysis of patriarchal practices, while the theory of character and characterization allowed the researcher to find the disadvantageous impact on Cassie Hanwell.

The theory of patriarchy was based on Walby's (1991) six patriarchy structures, which can be identified as household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and culture. As *Things You Save in a Fire* raises the issue of sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination, this study applied Walby's (1991) patriarchy theory with a focus on male violence and paid work. The male violence is in the form of sexual assault perpetrated by Heath Thompson, while the paid work is evident in the workplace gender discrimination.

For the second theory, the researcher applied feminism theory based on Judith Butler's theory. Butler (1988) argued that there is a set of gender roles assigned by society. This norm is established through the repetition of acts by society. However, gender itself is socially constructed, not an innate notion. The researcher infers that gender is an identity that is gradually built in time. It is an identity that is formed through the repetition of actions. This norm is established in society with the consequence that those who are considered to fail to do their gender right are punished. This rule is a means to uphold patriarchy (Butler, 1990). In this study, the feminist approach was applied to help explain how this social norm was related to the patriarchal practices experienced by Cassie Hanwell. The patriarchal practices are reflected through the events where Heath Thompson sexually assaults Cassie Hanwell. Captain Murphy and the firefighters in Lilian Fire Department also discriminate against Cassie Hanwell.

The third theory is based on Forster's (2003) theory of character. There are two types of character: round character and flat character. A flat character is formed in a single quality or form. In the reader's mind, they remain static, as these characters are not changed by circumstances. On the other hand, a round character is a character built with complex temperaments who has the ability to surprise readers. Cassie Hanwell, the main character in the novel, can be considered a round character. This is based on her development throughout

the story. After the sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination, she becomes lonesome, paranoid, skeptical, and aggressive, while also having suppressed feelings

The fourth theory is based on the characterization theory by Murphy (1972). There are nine ways in which an author presents a character. This study applied five of the nine techniques to analyze Cassie's change of behavior after the patriarchal practices. The five techniques are character as seen by another, speech, reaction, thought, and mannerism.

There are some related studies that discuss a similar topic as this study. Firstly, an undergraduate thesis from Prawesti (2018). Prawesti's study is about feminism reflected in *Eat, Pray, Love*, a memoir written by Elizabeth Gilbert (2006). The study identified the female characters who experienced the practices of patriarchy and analyzed the practices of patriarchy the female characters experienced. It also examined Gilbert's responses toward patriarchy, which depicted feminism. This study used a feminist approach.

Secondly, Kinanti (2019) studied feminism reflected through Celeste's struggle against domestic violence in *Big Little Lies*, a novel by Liane Moriarty (2014). The first purpose of the study was to analyze the patriarchal practices that occurred in Celeste's family. The second purpose was to identify the domestic violence that she experienced. The third purpose was to identify her struggle, which depicted feminism. Similar to Prawesti, Kinanti also applied the feminist approach.

All three studies discussed earlier are mainly concerned with the oppression that the female characters experienced based on feminist perspectives. Those studies slightly differed from the current study, whose aim was to find the change in the character's personality after she experienced the patriarchal practices.

## Methods

The object of this study was the novel *Things You Save in a Fire*, written by Katherine Center. The novel was published in 2019 with 29 chapters and 323 pages in total. The study used literary analysis and applied qualitative research methods

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted by selecting and grouping the excerpts according to the research questions. The first part of the excerpts would be about sexual assault and gender discrimination in the workplace. The second part of the excerpts was about the impacts of sexual assault and gender discrimination in the workplace.

There were several steps taken to analyze the data. First, the researcher read and reread *Things You Save in a Fire* in order to gain a deeper understanding of the content. Second, to address the research questions, the researcher analyzed the novel and selected excerpts that could be identified as practices of patriarchy with the help of Walby's (1991) theory about six patriarchy structures. Third, the researcher reread the novel and collected excerpts that showed the impacts of sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination on Cassie Hanwell's personality by applying Murphy's (1972) characterization theory. The researcher grouped Cassie's character into lonesome, paranoid, skeptical, aggressive, and suppressed feelings. Firstly, Cassie was identified as lonesome based on Murphy's (1972) technique of character as seen through her mannerisms, thought, speech, and reaction. Secondly, her becoming paranoid could be seen in her reactions, thinking, and speech. Thirdly, Cassie's becoming skeptical was analyzed in her speech. Fourthly, Cassie's aggressiveness could be observed in her thought, reactions, and speech. Lastly, Cassie's suppressed feelings were examined in her thought, speech, and reactions. In the last analysis step, the feminism theory was applied to discover the phenomenon of gender as a social construct in the novel.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study's purposes were to offer the depiction of patriarchal practices in the novel and the impact of patriarchal practices on Cassie Hanwell. The patriarchal practices in the novel were found in the form of sexual assault and workplace gender discrimination.

### **Patriarchal Practices in the Form of Sexual Assault**

At the beginning of the novel, Cassie Hanwell attends her award night together with the other firefighters from the Austin Fire Department. However, on that very night, when she is about to receive her award, she is sexually assaulted. Heath Thompson, the councilman and the person who gives her the award, gropes her backside on the stage.

I felt something pressing against my butt. Not just pressing against it, like I'd backed up to the podium or something. Cupping it. The only thing it could possibly be was Heath Thompson's other hand. The fact of it hit, the flashbulb popped, and then that hand gave my butt-cheek a bold, entitled, proprietary squeeze. (Center, 2019, p. 17)

Cassie states explicitly that she feels Heath Thompson's hand on her bottom, specifically a squeeze. Cassie also describes it as "bold," "entitled," and "proprietary" which means the act is not a coincidence but on purpose. Therefore, this act is considered sexual assault. Later, Cassie finds that DeStasio, her co-worker has filed a false report against her, and she confronts him. During her confrontation, she confesses that she was sexually assaulted on her 16th birthday by Heath Thompson, her former school crush.

Cassie also told DeStasio that Heath Thompson invited her to a party at his house. When Cassie arrived at his house, he draped his arms on her for the rest of the night. Later, Heath gave Cassie cups of spiked punch, a tropical alcoholic drink. Cassie became dizzy after taking the alcoholic drink, so Heath promised to take her home. However, instead of taking her home, Heath steered her out behind his garage and pushed her down into the mud. Cassie

tried to get away, but Heath grabbed her hair and tilted her head back to the point Cassie thought he might break her neck.

He pushes her face down so it's half buried in the mud. Mud fills her nose and her mouth and her eyes as he stops laughing and gets to work. She could have suffocated in that mud, for all he noticed or cared. (Center, 2019, p. 274)

Cassie explicitly states that it was while she is being held down, with her face buried in the mud, that Heath forced himself on her. Patriarchy perceives men as superior to women and women are considered part of men's property (Walby, 1991). The way Heath treats Cassie in this scene reflects Walby's theory.

According to Walby's theory, one of the six structures of patriarchal practices is male violence. It includes rape, sexual assault, wife-beating, and child sexual abuse. In the excerpts above, it can be seen that Heath Thompson considers Cassie as property. He sexually assaults Cassie Hanwell, first, when she is 16 and, second, on stage. Heath's audacity to sexually assault Cassie Hanwell for the second time in public shows that he has no respect nor fear for the consequences of his crime. His action could be considered a patriarchal practice as it reflects one of Walby's (1991) patriarchal structures in male violence structure, which covers rape.

### **Patriarchal Practice in the Form of Workplace Gender Discrimination**

Another finding related to the first research question was workplace gender discrimination. On the night of the second sexual assault incident, Cassie attacks Heath Thompson, her sexual assailant. As a result, Cassie needs to move to another fire department. Captain Harris, the female captain in her former fire department, reminds her that she will face unfair treatment in her new fire department as a woman. In connection to Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity, Cassie's becoming a firefighter shows that gender is performative. Gender is not an inherent identity but obtained from what we do day-to-day.



Cassie as a woman is able to work as a firefighter, a job that is traditionally viewed as a job for men because it associates with masculine traits such as stamina and strength. Her occupation here shows that she defies the gender stereotype. “All to say, I made sure he was totally sold on you before I broke the bad news.’ ‘The bad news?’ she shrugged, like, Duh. ‘That you’re a female” (Center, 2019, p. 43).

Captain Harris also tells Cassie that her soon-to-be captain in the new fire department, Captain Murphy, considers women the worst, and they originally would not hire a woman to be a firefighter if they were not desperate for recruits. On the telephone, Captain Murphy says, “Women are the worst” while talking to Captain Harris, a woman herself (Center, 2019, p. 43). From that scene, it can be seen that Captain Murphy does not care that he sounds sexist and discriminative; he even blatantly shows his discriminative belief as he is talking to Captain Harris who is a woman. Later, Captain Murphy admits that they will take Cassie to their fire department as they have been desperate for recruits, yet he does it in a belittling manner. Captain Murphy claims that he would take any person with experience and a pulse, even a woman. It can be inferred that Captain Murphy does not view men and women as equal beings. He thinks women are worth less than men.

Cassie’s new workplace is further emphasized to be a discriminative workplace when Captain Harris tells Cassie that she needs to write down some advice that will help her survive there. The first piece of advice that Harris gives Cassie is to not expect her new coworkers to like her, as they have disliked her even before they meet her. The captain also warns her that she may be ignored and excluded in her new workplace. Captain Harris tells Cassie that she might be seen as someone who tries to infiltrate and dismantle the brotherhood. Another practice of discrimination can also be found in the climax of the story when all the firefighters are on a mission at a burning grocery store. Cassie is grouped with Rookie and DeStasio. During their shift, DeStasio hallucinates, seeing a boy inside the building. The building is in

flames and the three of them are not allowed to go inside without orders from the captain. Cassie and Rookie do not see the boy that DeStasio claims to see. However, DeStasio insists on going inside and invites Rookie to come. Cassie has asserted multiple times that it is the wrong thing to do, but DeStasio keeps insisting. “‘I told you to stay put,’ I said. ‘I don’t take orders from women,’ DeStasio said. (Center, 2019, p. 244).

The three of them eventually find out that there is no boy in the building, and that DeStasio has been hallucinating. Cassie claims that she has told DeStasio to stay put, implying that he should have followed her. However, DeStasio replies that he does not take orders from women. This shows how sexist DeStasio is: he ignores Cassie's suggestion merely because she is a woman.

Another structure of patriarchy is paid work, which refers to the situation that segregates women from skilled jobs. Women and men typically do not work in the same job or industries; there is a gender division in terms of employment. Women may be skilled in the technical sense of the work, but they are not likely to get it recognized in terms of grading. Women's skills, or human capital, are more likely than men's to go unrecognized because of the different amounts of power between female and male workers (Walby, 1991). This can be seen through Cassie’s new captain, Murphy, and her coworkers' treatment of her. In her new workplace, Cassie is underestimated and her coworkers are also dismissive of her opinion. Even in the midst of critical times that risk the lives of others, her coworker, DeStasio, refuses to listen to her.

As stated by Butler (1990), every gender has a different role and the role has been established by society. Those who do not comply with the norm are punished. In this case, Cassie Hanwell chooses a role, a firefighter, that is not for women but for men. As a result, Cassie is considered someone who disrupts social control, the norm. Therefore, people discriminate against her as a form of punishment.

### **Impacts of Patriarchal Practices - Becoming Lonesome**

In the first chapter, Cassie's former coworker, Hernandez, asks Cassie to go out with him, but she refuses as she thinks it would be awkward since they work together. Hernandez adds that she has been living like a nun. Hernandez is one of Cassie's close friends in the fire department. This means that Hernandez knows her well. "'You need to stop living like a nun,' he said. 'What if I'm the cure for all your loneliness?' That got my attention.'" (Center, 2019, p. 8.).

Murphy (1972) stated that authors describe a character through mannerisms or habits. Correspondingly, the excerpt above shows that Cassie has a mannerism of a nun, that is, living in celibacy. The conversation above implies that Cassie has been living alone. "'I'm not lonely.' He frowned like I was certifiably insane. 'Guess what? You're the loneliest person I know'" (Center, 2019, p. 8.).

After being told that she is a lonely person, Cassie's initial reaction is to reject that idea. From her speech, it can be seen that Cassie denies that she is a lonely person. However, the next excerpt shows that Hernandez, as her friend, sees Cassie as the loneliest person he knows. In the novel, he points out how she has never dated anyone. He also suggests that she needs a human connection. "'Maybe I was lonelier than I'd realized. Maybe I did need something more. Maybe nothing in my life was quite what I thought'" (Center, 2019, p. 10).

According to Murphy (1972), a character's personality can be seen from their thoughts. In this excerpt, Cassie's inner thoughts show her belief. Cassie, who initially denies the fact that she has been companionless and lonely, starts to realize that it might be true.

The cause of her becoming a loner is confirmed in a later chapter. Cassie becomes closer with the new recruit, Owen, who is also called Rookie. However, instead of building a relationship with him, she pushes him away. Cassie fights against her feelings and avoids

Owen. Noticing her distant behavior, Owen asks if someone has hurt Cassie in the past and if it makes her push him away.

“So. Did somebody hurt you?” My first idea was to say some tough-guy thing, like, “Please.” But that wasn’t going to work, because there were already tears on my face. I’d already answered his question. So, very slowly, I just nodded. “Was it a guy?” I nodded again. “Was it bad?” I nodded again. (Center, 2019, p. 223)

This excerpt shows Cassie’s thoughts and her reaction, it can be inferred that her withdrawal behavior is caused by a painful experience. She is tearing up while being questioned by Rookie. She cannot even answer it with a speech but only gives a nod. As Rookie presses for further explanation, she reveals that the painful experience is caused by a guy. From here, it can be inferred that it is the sexual assault that Cassie experienced when she was 16. As reported by Haskell and Randall (2019), the tendency to isolate oneself is one of the possible impacts of the sexual assault experience. The sexual assault makes Cassie traumatized and reluctant to open up or become close with anyone. Since her trauma, Cassie thinks that people are dangerous, and she might get hurt once she becomes close to someone.

### **Impacts of Patriarchal Practices - Becoming Skeptical**

In chapter seven, Cassie is having a conversation with her mother when she is suddenly asked about her dating life. Her mother believes that people need a connection with others. However, Cassie has an opposing belief. Cassie confesses she has never become close with anyone, much less fallen in love. “How do you have conversations? Get to know each other? Fall in love?” ‘I told you,’ I said. ‘I don’t fall in love.’ ‘Surely you do, a little bit.’ ‘Nope,’ I said” (Center, 2019, p. 62).

From the conversation above, Cassie explicitly states that she does not fall in love with anyone. Cassie’s mother keeps pressing for more stories of Cassie’s dating life. She

eventually asks about Cassie's relationship with Heath Thompson, her former high school crush.

"Nothing ever happened with him." She responded slowly, like she somehow knew I was lying. "Oh," she said. "That's too bad." "Not really," I said. "He turned out to be a dick." The language made her blink. "Did he?" she said.

(Center, 2019, p. 64)

Cassie tells her mother that nothing has happened between them, and that, in fact, he turned out to be a bad person. However, Cassie does not tell the real event that happened between her and Heath Thompson. She simply tells her mother that nothing happened between them.

"I feel sad for all the women out there dragging their boyfriends to Bed Bath & Beyond and making them shop for throw pillows. They want the fantasy more than they want the truth." "What's the truth?" she challenged. "The truth is that love doesn't exist." (Center, 2019, p. 65)

Cassie's mother keeps trying to convince her that love exists and is not like what Cassie imagines. However, she still holds the same belief that is based on her past experience. She becomes not only a loner but also skeptical of having relationships. Cassie's attitude regarding relationships tends to be skeptical rather than critical. She doubts the belief of others, in this case, her mother. However, she does not apply the same skepticism or questions to her own belief. Her bad past with Heath Thompson makes her traumatized and unable to see that she still has the opportunity to be in a good relationship. This also reflects the report published by the Department of Justice Canada (Haskell & Randall, 2019) which mentioned feelings of betrayal and detachment and a tendency to minimize experience as a way of coping as a result of sexual assault. Her younger self was betrayed by the sexual assault event.

Therefore, Cassie diminishes her feelings and denies the possibility of love as a way to cope with her traumatic experience.

### **Impacts of Patriarchal Practices - Becoming Paranoid**

In the novel, Cassie is described as a paranoid person. She is constantly on guard and easily startled by her surroundings. This can be seen through the scenes when she is startled by her coworkers and reacts in self-defense. In chapter ten, Cassie is about to fall asleep but is awakened by the loud noise of firefighters hollering and bursting through the storage closet door: “I should have expected them. I did expect them. But they scared the hell out of me anyway. In response, I shouted and launched up into a jiu-jitsu crouch on top of my mattress” (Center, 2019, p. 81).

In relation to Murphy’s (1972) theory, a character’s reaction is one of the ways authors describe their personality. The passage above shows that Cassie is startled by the crew and reacts by posing in a jiu-jitsu crouch as a way to protect herself. Her thoughts also show that she has expected them, but she could not help overreacting because of her fear. Seeing her unexpected reaction, all of the guys freeze in surprise. This incident happens more than once. In chapter fifteen, Cassie is once again startled and reacts in self-defense mode when Owen approaches her after she falls asleep on the rooftop. As a result, she accidentally kicks Owen (Center, 2019, p. 127). As reported by Haskell and Randall (2019), hyper-alertness or hyper-vigilance is one of the impacts of sexual assault trauma.

“I had lots of nightmares. But I didn’t usually have them on shift. In this one, I dreamed I was suffocating. I must have stopped breathing during the worst of it, because when I woke up, there in my storage-closet bed at the station, I was gasping for air and nauseated—as if I really had been suffocating.” (Center, 2019, p. 119)

In connection to Cassie's jittery behavior, she experiences recurrent nightmares in her sleep. Her thought process above shows that in her nightmare, Cassie is suffocating. This connects to what happened during her sexual assault. Cassie's face was planted in the mud while she was assaulted. She also feels she is suffocating that night.

As soon as she wakes up from that dream, she goes to the kitchen and gets herself a glass of water. In the kitchen, she finds Rookie. Rookie asks what happens in her nightmares. She tells him that she is always being strangled, chased, or suffocated. There are times when all three things happen together in a nightmare.

“Just since I was sixteen.” “Why sixteen? I could have shrugged, like I didn't know. Instead, I said, “That was the year my mother left.” It wasn't the whole story, but it was more than I'd ever confessed to anybody else. (Center, 2019, p. 121)

Cassie explicitly tells Rookie that her nightmares have happened since she turned 16 years old. However, as he presses for the real cause, she deflects and tells him it is because her mother abandons her instead. However, Cassie herself knows that the cause of her nightmare is the sexual assault. From these excerpts, it can be concluded that Cassie's paranoia is caused by the sexual assault she experienced.

### **Impacts of Patriarchal Practices - Becoming Aggressive**

Cassie is furious when she is sexually assaulted for the second time by Heath Thompson. She instantly attacks Heath when she realizes he is groping her bottom: “And I lost it. Given everything, it's a miracle I didn't literally kill him. There was nothing else I could possibly have done. I turned and whomped Heath Thompson on the head with my oak-and-metal plaque so hard” (Center, 2019, p. 17).

Based on Cassie's reaction in the excerpt above, it can be seen that she loses control by the time Heath touches her bottom. From her inner thoughts, it can be concluded that she is extremely furious.

I landed a punch to the face, a knuckle strike to the windpipe, and at least one jab to the solar plexus before adding a few good kicks to the ribs with my pumps after he hit the floor. Nobody saw it coming, not even me. (Center, 2019, p. 20)

The line above shows Cassie's extreme reaction. It also implies that there is an imprint of trauma left on Cassie. Cassie has an anger outburst when she faces her sexual assailant, Heath Thompson, and she attacks him violently. The fact that Cassie herself does not see it (her attack) coming shows that this is not something she usually does. According to the American Psychological Association (2017), traumatic events that include sexual violence, war, natural disasters, and accidents can result in harmful consequences. The majority of survivors experience long-lasting problems which include anxiety, fear, shame, anger, and aggression.

"I don't remember this part, but according to Hernandez, the whole time, I was shouting, 'Touch me again, douchebag! Touch me again and see how long you live!'" (Center, 2019, p. 20). The excerpt above shows that while attacking Heath Thompson, Cassie is also shouting and calling him names. From Cassie's speech and reaction, it can be seen clearly that the sexual assault triggered her and made her aggressive. In relation to Butler's (1988) theory about gender performativity, Cassie shows that gender is not an inherent identity but a social construct. In the novel, Cassie's becoming aggressive shows that she exhibits a personality trait that is stereotypically considered to be masculine. It can be inferred that becoming aggressive is not a trait that exclusively belongs to men. It is also possible for a woman to have the aggressive trait.



### **Impacts of Patriarchal Practices - Having Suppressed Feelings**

Before Cassie moved to the Lillian Fire Department, her captain had warned her not to develop feelings for or relationships with a fellow firefighter. Her captain explains it might make her lose her job, and not the other guy, as she is a woman (Center, 2019, p. 48). Despite her attempt to stay celibate, Cassie slowly develops feelings for Owen, but she does not show it.

“It must have made you so angry. You’re there to do a job—and you’ve got this house full of guys who underestimate you like every minute of the day—and the last thing you need is some rookie mooning over you.” (Center, 2019, p. 93)

One day, Owen confesses his feelings to Cassie without knowing that Cassie also shares similar feelings. From his speech, it can be inferred that Cassie is serious about her job. Rookie’s speech also confirms that the firefighters in the Lilian Department have been underestimating Cassie. “Can you imagine the guys? If they even suspected—even if you didn’t condone it or even know—they’d give you endless shit about it. They’d make the firehouse a living hell.” (Center, 2019, p. 93).

As Rookie continues to talk, it can be inferred that Rookie as a man himself can see how Cassie’s coworkers will give her a hard time if they are romantically involved. Despite knowing Rookie’s feelings for her, Cassie still does not confess her feelings for him. Cassie, who gets underestimated by her coworkers for being a female firefighter, might have her job jeopardized if she is romantically involved with Rookie. As a result, she has to suppress her feelings for Rookie. She tries to avoid Rookie and volunteers when coworkers want to prank him: “Whatever the guys needed done, I did it. I volunteered. I thought it would separate us. I thought, at the very least, it would annoy the rookie and discourage him” (Center, 2019, p. 111).

This passage shows Cassie's thoughts about her relationship with Owen. Cassie is trying hard to separate herself from Rookie despite their feelings for each other. She even goes the extra mile to volunteer for any kind of pranks that the crew initiates just so they will not be suspicious of her and Rookie. However, before the first sexual assault from Heath Thompson, Cassie was able to express her romantic feelings to Heath Thompson. After the sexual assault, Cassie stopped dating anyone and becomes unable to express her romantic feelings to Owen. As stated by American Psychological Association (2017), many survivors who experience traumatic events might experience nightmares, insomnia, somatic disturbances, difficulty with intimate relationships, and loss of trust. From here, the researcher concludes that the sexual assault Cassie has experienced makes her traumatized and it becomes difficult for her to be involved in a relationship.

Later in the novel, Owen is hospitalized and kept in the ICU. Cassie is prohibited from seeing him as she is assumed to be the one who caused his injuries. Finally, Cassie confesses to the captain that she loves Owen, with the hopes that he will let her see him. She also confesses that she has never told Owen or the crew about her feelings.

“He's the person who makes everything else matter. But I never told him that. I was afraid of losing my job. Or of losing the guys' respect. I know what you all think, that love is weakness.” The captain closed his eyes and shook his head.

(Center, 2019, p. 257)

In the passage above, Cassie explicitly states that she fears reciprocating Owen's feelings will result in losing the crew's respect and losing her job at the Lillian Fire Department. By analyzing the captain's reaction, it can be inferred that he disapproves and is not pleased with Cassie's confession.

“I need to see him,” I said, my voice starting to crumble. “Oh, no,” the captain said. “Do not cry.” “I'm not crying,” I said, as I wiped my face. “Women,” the

captain said, taking in the sight of me, shaking his head. “This is what I’m saying.” (Center, 2019, p. 258)

In the novel, Cassie’s confession to Captain Murphy does not change his mind to allow her to see Owen. Cassie eventually breaks down and cries in front of the captain. Seeing her desperation and tears, the captain chides her with the word “women” and implies that he has predicted that this would eventually happen. Here, Captain Murphy is stigmatizing Cassie. Crying is often equated to weakness and women. Captain Murphy’s comment implies that he believes Cassie is crying because she is the weaker gender, not because of the unfortunate event that she has gone through.

Ever since Cassie arrived at her new workplace, the crew has underestimated Cassie’s competency as a female firefighter. Furthermore, being involved in romantic relationships with the other firefighters risks her losing the crew’s respect and her job. From these events, it can be concluded that the crew’s discriminatory treatment of Cassie and her sexual assault experience makes her suppress her feelings toward Owen.

### **Conclusion**

Cassie Hanwell, a firefighter from Austin Fire Department who later moves to Lillian Fire Department, has experienced patriarchal practices and their negative impacts on herself. The patriarchal practices that she experiences are sexual assault and gender discrimination in the workplace. Cassie Hanwell is sexually assaulted at the age of 16 by her former high school crush, Heath Thompson, after being given spiked punch, a tropical alcoholic drink. Ten years later, Cassie once again experiences sexual assault, and it is also perpetrated by Heath Thompson. She is groped by Heath on stage while receiving her award.

Inevitably, there are negative impacts that Cassie has to endure. After the events of the sexual assault, Cassie becomes lonesome and skeptical of relationships. Furthermore, she also

becomes a paranoid person and experiences recurring nightmares. Lastly, the sexual assault incident makes her become aggressive.

The other form of patriarchal practice that Cassie Hanwell has to struggle against is gender discrimination in the workplace. She is constantly underestimated, doubted, and treated unfairly by her male co-workers. The belief that women are inferior beings puts Cassie in a disadvantageous situation in her new workplace. As a result of the sexual assault and discrimination, Cassie has to suppress her feelings to protect herself and prevent being terminated from her job. This situation reflects the theory from Butler (1990) that gender is socially constructed, that it is not an inherent identity and that those who do not comply with the norm will be punished. In Cassie's case, she is a woman who defies the stereotype that being a firefighter is only a man's job. Moreover, she is also someone who rebels against the traditional norm because of her profession as a firefighter. As a consequence, the people around her, her coworkers, and the captain discriminate against her as a form of punishment.

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