

Deciphering Cassandra as a Radical Feminist in *Promising Young Woman* (2020)

Alika Rahma Syarifa,¹

Jenderal Soedirman University, Indonesia

Ririn Kurnia Trisnawati²

Jenderal Soedirman University, English Language and Literature Department, Indonesia

Mia Fitria Agustina³

Jenderal Soedirman University, English Language and Literature Department, Indonesia

Abstract

Every woman has a different nature, either a strong one or a weak one. Not all women have a lucky fate; in fact, many of them are victimized by men. Of the many cases of violence and sexual harassment in the world, it is women who are most often the victims, especially in cases of sexual acts without consent. In *Promising Young Woman* (2020), these issues are conveyed very well. Its main character, Cassandra, is on a mission to target men who try to take advantage of drunken women and make those men deterrent and frightened. The purpose of this qualitative study on the film is to discuss the behavior of radical feminism living in the character of Cassandra. Cassandra displays a radical feminist attitude in order to achieve revenge and conveys a message about women's rights to obtain justice. Radical feminism occurs based on three key issues: sexual objectification of women, rape, and patriarchy. The result shows that Cassandra can fully be claimed as a radical feminist because several characteristics of radical feminism match the nature and behavior of Cassandra in the film. These are opposition to the sexual objectification of women, sexism, and toxic masculinity, and lastly patriarchy.

Keywords: *radical feminism, women's rights, sexual harassment.*

INTRODUCTION

Women experience various types of harassment and violent. An instance is sexual assault or rape, especially when they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The alcohol influence that disrupts sobriety is one of the weakest points of a woman when she is left alone or walks alone in the middle of the night. Such circumstance possibly makes her as subject of sexual assault or harassment by men. Some researchers noted about sexual assault led by alcohol in which the estimation for alcohol use among perpetrators has ranged from 34-74%. Approximately one-half of all sexual assault victims reported that they were drinking alcohol at the time of the assault, with estimates ranging from 30-79% (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2001). As we can see from the percentage, men commit their actions at a time when women are mostly vulnerable. At least one-half of all violent crimes involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, the victim, or both (Collins and Messerschmidt 1993). Despite such condition, the victims were also under the influence of alcohol, and this does

Corresponding Author: Ririn Kurnia Trisnawati, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia email: ririn.trisnawati@unsoed.ac.id

mean that it was their fault for getting this accident. Such acts are committed without the consent of both parties, and they can be claimed to be criminal acts, which can harm one party physically and mentally.

Only a few women had enough courage to reveal indecent sexual acts committed against them, and even then, not everything went flawless as they tried to demand their rights. From modern times until now, the settlement of several cases is still being processed through the courts. Several things can make it difficult for victims to win their cases. One of them is possibly some views of society that are persistent against feminists and then they side with the men who are the perpetrators of these actions. Those become some of the difficulties that prevent most women from getting their justice.

However, from these many obstacles, feminist movements have formed to fight for their rights and speak up against narrow thoughts on the existence of women. In the late '60s and early '70s, the anti-rape movement was enforced, along with the emergence of second-wave feminism. This movement has lifted every woman's spirit and awakened them to do more for justice. It was proven by the speech by Polly Poskin, Executive Director of the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, as follows:

I remember the New York Radical Feminists held a "Speak Out" on rape in New York City in 1971. I came to understand that if women were to gain equality and be free to move about safely in this culture, we were going to have to have sexual safety. If women were to feel liberated, they needed to be safe. And I realized that if we don't end violence in women's lives, women were never going to be safe, free, and even remotely equal to men in all the areas of life that we might like to pursue (Tofte & Poskin, 2006).

Feminists all over the world raise their voices in their way; one of which is through the object that is studied in this current study, a film titled *Promising Young Woman* (2020). It is a film that features talks about sexual assault and its justifications by solving the problems in the film that can increase questionable morals.

According to "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief – Updated Release", one in three female victims of completed or attempted rape experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17 (Smith et al., 2018). People of those ages are considered underage. Then, statistics on those aged 17 and above shows that women aged 18-24 who are college students are 3 times more likely than women in general to experience sexual violence (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). This reason is what *Promising Young Woman* brings to the table: the aftermath of sexual assault due to alcohol effect. The film narrates about a pair of friends, Cassie and Nina; Nina committed suicide due to severe depression after being raped when she was unconscious because of the influence of alcohol during their college time. Cassie felt devastated by Nina's death. Then she performed a kind of social experiment that culminated in the prosecution of threats to men who always teased and tried to perform sexual acts without the consent of heavily drunk women. Cassie's final purpose is only to seek justice for Nina and to prosecute the perpetrators who raped her. Cassie directly showed action and raised her voice about the difficulties of women who often became victims of sexual harassment to the audience of the film *Promising Young Woman* (2020). This action raised a question about her behavior that is inclined to radical feminism. According to the Associate Professor of Political Science, Gonzaga University, Laura Brunell, and the Professor of Journalism, University of Alaska Elinor Burkett (2021),

Radical feminism aimed to reshape society and restructure its institutions, which they saw as inherently patriarchal. Providing the core theory for modern feminism, radicals argued that women's subservient role in society was too closely woven into the social fabric to be unraveled without a revolutionary

revamping of society itself. They strove to supplant hierarchical and traditional power relationships they saw as reflecting a male bias, and they sought to develop non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian approaches to politics and organization (Brunell & Brukett, 2021).

Moreover, the current study on *Promising Young Woman* aims at deciphering how Cassie's acts in the film are arguably part of the movement of being a radical feminist. By analyzing it, we expect to channel instances of radical feminist actions of fighting for other women that can be identified from a certain film.

METHODS

This study employed qualitative nature in research. Following McMillan and Schumacher (1993), qualitative research is “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories” (p.479). Qualitative research is used to understand how people experience the world. While there are many approaches to qualitative research, they tend to be flexible and focus on retaining rich meaning when interpreting data.

Various data were sourced from the film itself, book references, electronic articles, and journals available and related to this research. The data are thus the words taken from the sentences, dialogues, paragraphs, and plotlines within the film that describe the act of radical feminism. They were obtained through some steps in order to get all the correct data for the materials of the identifications. The first step was watching the film and then reading through articles, journals, and websites on the issues of radical feminism. Next, by taking notes on the current news, issues, and ideas by skimming through opinions and researching several journals, the researchers also focused on the movie's storyline. The third step was to analyze radical feminism in Cassie. While deciphering, we collected some related research, such as the percentage of sexual harassment cases, sexual assault on women, sexual assault under the influence of alcohol, the anti-rape movement, and radical feminism. The analysis of the study was assisted by supporting data in the form of various sources of scientific articles from the internet and journals, and the analysis included supporting evidence from research objects in the form of film clips and dialogues between characters.

In the last step, we analyzed to identify whether or not Cassie's behavior aligns with what is called radical feminism. The analysis aimed to get valid appropriate data for the research problems. There were some steps in doing data analysis as follows. The first was reviewing the data after the data were collected. The second was classifying the data that addressed the research problems. The third was analyzing the data that explained radical feminism and women's right. Lastly, the authors concluded the analyzed data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of this current study is to examine the actions of Cassandra that align with radical feminism. The characterization of the literary work is crucial since each character—protagonist and antagonist—has unique tendencies. Furthermore, it contains unique moral, intellectual, and emotional content (Jayaputri, 2022). This characterization elements determine the character's action, which helps in discussing the radical feminist behavior of the main character, Cassandra “Cassie”, in this article. It is necessary to know beforehand the reasons for the emergence of Cassie's radical acts in *Promising Young Woman* (2020). However, firstly, we need to discuss the aims of radical feminism to

further detail the issues that radical feminists are fighting for. Ellen Willis (1984) stated that radical feminism is about raising the voice of women's struggles, including raising public awareness on the issues such as rape and assault against women by opposing sexual objectification of women; the second one is opposing sexism and toxic masculinity, and the third one is rejecting the patriarchal foundations of inequality between men and women. These three key main issues can provide solid evidence to the issues raised in the film *Promising Young Woman* (2020). Each aspect will be discussed in the following parts.

3.1 Opposing Sexual Objectification of Women

At the beginning of the film, Cassie becomes the victim of sexual objectification herself when she gets cat-called by a bunch of construction workers. Women dealt with catcallers most of the time. Statistics show that out of 16,000 women, 84% of them first experienced street harassment before the age of 17 (Holland, Koval, Stratemeyer, Thomson, & Haslam, 2016). What most women typically do when they are getting cat-called is to brush it over or rather keep on walking away. For Cassie, it was different. She would glare at the men who cat-called her until it made them uncomfortable to mess around more with Cassie. Such a scene already depicts Cassie's feelings towards men, namely not knowing fear and acting intimidating to give a warning image that she is not the kind of woman who is weak or timid.

There were also other clips from the film showing off the part when Cassie was being sexually objectified in the nightclub. To give itself the context, the men Cassie had met at the club were gathering and chatting when they found Cassie sitting half-conscious. The problem was they unashamedly made comments about Cassie's physical state and started to say inappropriate things about her. Beforehand, the men eased the topic of their conversation by talking about Cassie as if they pitied and were concerned about her lying alone as shown in the dialogue said by the Guy 1: "If she's not careful, someone's gonna take advantage, especially kind of guys in this club". However, it shifted back to "dirty talk" about Cassie as observed in the following conversation.

Guy 2: "She's kind of hot."

Guy 1: "a hot fucking mess,"

Guy 1: "I mean that it just asking for it,"

They approached more towards seeing Cassie as a bet of becoming a sexual object. It is all part of the psychological game; men despise it when they cannot overcome something. When men realize that they cannot get girls, they try everything to win her attention. When challenged, their dedication to regain the respect from others grows stronger as they have something to prove. They are motivated by a desire to prove to the people around them that they are real men which manifests itself as a demand for validation, acceptance, and respect from their kind (Jesse, 1970). The men do it so for the sake of confidence as well. A recent study shows the difference in confidence between men and women, in which "a common explanation for observed confidence differences is that women's behavior is affected by their insecurity within male-dominated decision-making organizations" (Nicholson and West, 198). Also, whoever gets to take Cassie out of the club and "sleep" with her will win the masculine throne as dubbed that "a woman in a patriarchal culture engages with sexuality, they argue, she becomes an object that is defined and controlled by men" (Paasonen, Attwood, McKee, Mercer, & Smith, 2020). Seeing a woman on the verge of consciousness, instead of helping to protect the woman who could be in danger, they made her an object of stake for whoever could bring Cassie home with one of them. Guy 1 even said "sounds like a challenge Paul,"

emphasizing that what they are doing is fun. Usually, if they are told so, men will feel more challenged and do what the other person tells them when the others seem to underestimate them. Therefore, it was Paul who finally brought Cassie home. At first, he looked like a gentleman. However, his lust is bigger than his conscience. He suddenly switches his mind midst the trip way back to delivering Cassie. Therefore, instead of Cassie's house, they return to his place.

When they get to the house, Cassie immediately gets laid down on the bed, and Paul starts kissing and touching her inappropriately when clearly Cassie responds with an uncomfortable tone. Cassie then asks him, "What are you doing?" with a snarky tone. Most women normally can only resist the particular action by words or saying "no" to prevent an unwanted behavior that could end badly. However, there was a reason Cassie went home with Paul and laid down in his bed. Eventually, Cassie did a 180 degrees and disclosed her drunk act to show sobriety, from looking limp to suddenly showing a firm attitude. The sharp wailing of her eyes gives an eerie effect. The question was why Cassie waited for the man to act and then showed that she had not been drunk all this time and why she did not do it from the start she got home. It is all because Cassie wanted to show her bravery as a woman and teach the man a lesson about never taking advantage of an unconscious woman for a non-consensual sexual act. Sometimes Cassie would explain why she did what she did to them frontally. In order for some men to understand what they did was wrong, Cassie warned them about making that a life lesson for not messing around with women.

Another clip is when Cassie went on a blind date with a guy named Neil. Neil was persistent in getting Cassie drunk and high on cocaine, little did he know he was being tested by Cassie on whether he is a good guy or a bad guy trying to take advantage of women.

Neil : "What is this? Are you some kind of psychopath or something?"
Cassie : "Why would you said that?"
Neil : "I thought that you were."
Cassie : "Drunk?"

Cassie is even mistaken for a psychopath because she changes drastically. Cassie concludes that a man's logic in dating a woman is that she must be in a situation where he can completely control her. This reasoning reinforces her thoughts about men regarding their treatment of women. In the end, she scares the men away and warns them never to mess around with an unconscious woman again without consent. Radical feminists believe that male heterosexuality objectifies the female body and makes the domination and degradation of women a source of erotic stimulation (Meyers, 2014). What is shown here is part of radical feminism e.g., preventing men from sexually harassing women and preventing with its way of dealing with stonewalling. She was trying to seek rights and justice for her late-best friend, but in the most extreme way possible. Cassie is simply trying to claim her proof of why and how men behave around women, specifically drunk women. Thus, she keeps the proof to herself as a self-realization of how men act around women. The anger against the male side continues to build up, shaping the thinking that fits with radical feminists.

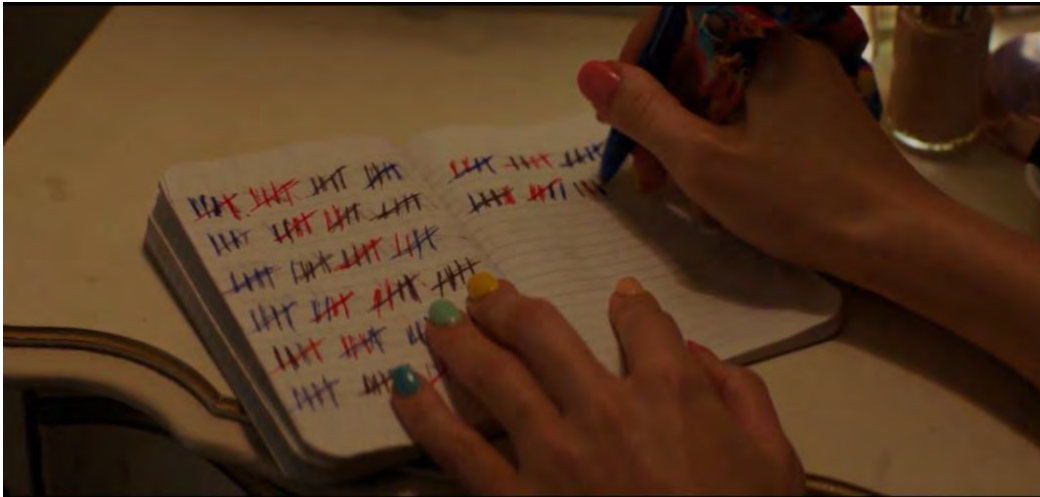


Figure 1. Cassie's list of men

Furthermore, from Figure.1, we can see that Cassie has been doing this lots of times. The color coding of the pen might indicate something about the outcome of the men she went out with. It is evident that the list contains a large number of males. The remaining blank sheets indicate Cassie is still considering doing more. This mark shows that Cassie has not yet found a glimmer of hope in her goal of finding men who can treat women respectfully and do not see women as sexual object when they are feckless.

Due to the fact that Cassie's previously described act was risky for a woman to get herself into, her strategy for coping with the termination of objectification is viewed as radical. Even a typical type of feminist would not think of putting themselves in danger in an effort to obtain some rights by allowing their body to be toyed with by men. In those situations, naturally, women want to avoid being used as sexual objects. There is a hypothesis about *risk to self versus others* as quoted below:

We expected that participants would view their own risk of being attacked as less than that of the "average American" of their gender, whether the aggressor was an intimate or a stranger. Such a belief might reflect an accurate perception for a population of university students but is even more likely to reflect a self-protective and self-enhancing social comparison bias that highly unpleasant or unwanted events are more likely to happen to others than to oneself (Taylor et al., 1990, 1995, 1983).

The idea behind this assumption is to encourage women to take as few risk as feasible. Unlike other women, Cassie, a radical feminist, ignores these orders and advice. What Cassie did gives mix-up feelings. The idea of placing herself in a risky and uncomfortable situation in order to somewhat achieve the goal of preventing the sexual objectification of women is an irresponsible thing a single woman should do to herself. On the other hand, Cassie has awakened a fierce feminist soul, battling valiantly for a woman's right to her body.

The same thing that Cassie went through in terms of being a victim of sexual assault also occurred to Nina, her best friend. The difference is that Nina did not respond to the perpetrator the way Cassie did. Consequently, Nina had the worse experience because Nina went through all the traumatic assaults. The core story of this film is that the main character, Cassie, has retaliation against men who share the same mindset and traits as the perpetrator, who tried to make Nina his sexual object and even taped the entire incident.

Thus, the main theme in this film is about Nina, Cassie's closest friend, who was raped by Al Monroe, in the film *Promising Young Woman* (2020). Nina was heavily under the influence of alcohol; she blacked out when Al Monroe was doing non-consensual sexual intercourse with her. Sadly, no one accepts Nina's claims that Al Monroe sexually assaulted her, despite Cassie's knowledge and conviction of the incident. Nina became extremely depressed as a result. Remorse, disgust, and defiance to Nina's unjustly tainted status formed the basis of her depression. Such experiences, particularly the traumatic ones, influence our future and affect our behavior without our being aware of it (Al Areqih, 2022). Facing her closest friend's case triggers the building of the radical mindset and behavior of Cassie.

Fast forward in the film, Maddison, Cassie and Nina's colleague, gave a recording of Nina getting raped by Al Monroe. The tape is the living proof of Nina becoming a sexual object and being viewed by others.



Figure 2 Cassie saw the video

What is shown here aligns to the state of “witnessing the objectification of other women that was also followed by reliable increases in self-objectification, with similar negative downstream consequences for emotional well-being” (Koval, Holland, & Stratemeyer, 2021). The clip in Figure 2 depicts the unsettling part. The camera position is in the center and focuses on Cassie's facial expression. Despite the fact that the public missed the video disclosure, the disturbing content of the video is indicated by Cassie's response as the camera slowly pans into her and by the terror in her eyes as she witnesses her unconscious best friend sexually assaulted. The evidence she saw caused her to disrupt mentally and emotionally. Overcoming this is Cassie's emotionally and mentally unstable behavior, described by her parents as depression, self-seclusion, and lack of passion for life, causing Cassie to spend more time planning radical ideas to take revenge on the perpetrators of Nina's rape. Because of this, she also rationalized what she had done to the men she allured beforehand, and will continue her mission to bring the perpetrators of violence against women to justice.

3.2 Opposing Sexism and Toxic Masculinity

Sexism plays a big part in determining the nature of each role. The analysis can be drawn from the clip of Neil's part again. This dialogue of Neil gave a toxic trait and became a trigger of sexism.

Neil : “But why are you wearing all that make up? Do you mind me asking?”

I never really understood why women wear so much makeup, is like you guys are so much more beautiful without it. It’s like guys don’t like that kind of stuff you know? It's just this soul-sucking system meant to oppress women. That's f*cked up,”

Cassie intended to do heavy makeup, and she just wanted to know another man’s opinion about it, whether he would stay silent or comment on it. Cassie shows men the principle of “My body, my rule”, indicating that women can do whatever they want with their bodies, including wearing as much makeup as they want to. Sexism explained by Human Right Channel is that “individual acts of sexism may seem benign, but they create a climate of intimidation, fear, and insecurity. This leads to the acceptance of violence, mostly against women and girls” (Council of Europe, 2020). Hence, Cassie, as a radical feminist, would not let this happen to her. Therefore, to prevent Neil from doing or saying any sexist stuff to other women and harming others, she behaves in a way that intimidated Neil to warn him not to ‘mess around with a woman’.

At one moment, Neil has this trait of ‘playing victim’ by saying that he is a good person who does not deserve to be hurt. This trait of his makes Cassie see the toxic side of Neil. He claimed to be a good person, but in the previous scene, he treated a woman inappropriately. Despite this, Neil was frightened by her intimidation, which looked as if she wanted to hurt Neil. The kind of strength and courage that Cassie has consequently makes the men, who were caught red-handed, demean their masculinity. The premise of why assaults by men seem to be common is that straight cis-gendered men are trying to be virile by securing their sexuality. This is evidenced by “heterosexuality being defined by male dominance and action” (Paasonen, Attwood, McKee, Mercer, & Smith, 2020). This statement means that some heterosexual men use their sexuality as a power to control and to dominate women. This behavior is known as toxic masculinity.

However, few women in this film had sexist traits towards their gender. Apart from Cassie and her boss at the coffee store, there are hardly women supporting women in this film. The case in point is Maddison, Cassie and Nina’s old friend. The encounter with her old friend is a test to see if Maddison has changed her mind about Nina's situation since she first heard it seven years ago. Even after devising a strategy to get Maddison to consume as much wine or alcohol as possible, she still did not feel comfortable discussing it with Cassie.

Cassie : “Do you roll your eyes behind her back, dismiss the whole thing as drama?”

Maddison : “I don’t know why you’re mad at me! I’m not the only one who didn’t believe it. If you had a reputation for sleeping around then maybe people weren’t going to believe you when you said something’s happened. I mean...it’s crying wolf,”

Cassie : “You think it’s crying wolf?”

Maddison : “I don’t make the rules! When you get that drunk, things happened. Don’t get black out drunk all the time, and then expect people to be on your side when you had sex with someone you don’t want to,”

Unfortunately, based on her statements and attitude, she still thinks about not trusting Nina because she has a bad sexual reputation. As it is known, Cassie got the distribution of the video footage from Maddison. Maddison questions Al's behavior in this situation and expresses her opinion on whether Nina was sexually assaulted. It proves that

Madison does not speak up or practice feminism to support other women out of jealousy. Nina has the reputation of being an intelligent student in her class. The others abused Nina's sexual harassment case because if Nina could tumble from the highest rank, that could be the potential key to success for other students. Then, as a form of retaliation, Cassie hires a man to take Maddison, who is already married, to a hotel room while she is only partially conscious. The goal is for Cassie to give her an idea of Nina's condition at that time. Eventually, the situation made Maddison uncomfortable with the uncertainty of whether a bad or sexual incident had happened to her.

Cassie's side of feminism was shown when she tried to prove that women can be more dominant than men by proving that women can be assertive with men although Cassie's actions were more intimidating rather than assertive. Her intimidating stare can make men back off and stop them from behaving indecently toward women. Because her aura of psycho-genius is a lot more terrifying than most men can handle, the majority of those men (who appear early in the film) do not dare strike Cassie back violently. Instead, they are afraid that something might have happened to them, except for the scene near the end of the film, where Cassie pretends to be a stripper for Al Monroe's bachelor party at the cabin. At first, no one realizes it is Cassie, but when it is just Cassie and Al alone, he starts to realize who she is when Cassie mentions that her 'real name' is Nina Fisher. Al got freaked out and begged Cassie to unleash him from the bed, knowing that he had done something awful to Nina and the guilt starting to rise. None of his friends come to help Al because they are all drugged by Cassie.

Cassie: "I don't think they can hear you, and even if they could, they're all passed out by now. Cause, if there's one thing, I learned at Forrest is how easy it is to slip something into a drink. You'd think they would remember that, especially Joe"

Here, Cassie teaches Al and his friends how easy it is to tamper with a drink (alcohol) by putting "something" in it. To prevent Al's pals from supporting him in the confrontation he was about to have with Cassie, Cassie drugged them all; in light of Nina's previous experiences, she consumed a drink that Al had drugged, and the alcohol consumption further rendered her unconscious. By disguising herself as a sexy nurse to trick the party, Cassie exacts vengeance while appropriating ideas of hegemonic masculinity.

Cassie : "I want you to tell me what you did"
Al : "I didn't do anything! We were kids!"
Al: : "Maybe she regretted it after,"
Cassie : "Oh yeah, she regretted it,"
Al : "Look I didn't do anything!"
Cassie : "Wrong!"

All Cassie wanted from Al was a confession and a sense of remorse. However, Al just evades saying that he never did it, further showing his defence mechanism to maintain his 'good guy' image. His attitude frustrates Cassie even more. She is relentless in her efforts to get Al to give up and confess. The more she pushes the subject of Nina's rape, the more reluctant Al becomes to plead his actions, giving illogical reasons that Cassie certainly does not accept.

Al : "We didn't even.."
Cassie : "What..? she could barely hold her head up. She had no idea what was going on."
Al : "It was a f-ing party. Yeah, we were all drunk, of course. But she was into it!"

Cassie : “ Didn’t look like she was into it in the video,”

His denial of what he has done by distorting the fact that Nina also enjoys it is a toxic thing for a man to do. Cassie also used her ace card to halt his toxic behavior by informing him that there was proof in the video documentation form. When Al learnt that Joe, his best friend, had captured some incriminating video, he instantly begged Cassie for her cooperation without making any promises. However, his stubbornness keeps appearing, saying the following shameless things in the context of the situation.

Al : “You know I was affected by it too. It’s every guy’s worst nightmare to getting accused like that,”

Cassie : “Can you guess what every women’s worst nightmare is? The thing is you thought you’d gotten away with it because everyone has forgotten it,”

“The trauma response model and the clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have helped to acknowledge the significance of the harm caused to people who have been sexually assaulted, and the extent of the violation they have experienced,” (Boyd, 2011). The impact of the sexual assault on Nina was depression, which led to suicide. The film *Promising Young Women* (2020) provides an overview of the aftermath of rape for both perpetrators and victims. While Nina sputtered, dropped out of school, became miserable, and ultimately made the decision to take her own life, Al continued to live a peaceful and prosperous existence. Of course, the second problem that feminists despise is sexist men who believe that the lives of men is more difficult than those of women. Rape cases, which are currently primarily filed by women, have made life extremely difficult for women, particularly those who do not have access to justice. This has a greater negative impact on women because their mental, physical, and moral values are already at the threshold and are worse than those of male perpetrators, who mostly continue their lives calmly without any burdens. Al's sexist thoughts are constantly used as defensive arguments that are not worthy to serve as vindication. Cassie wanted to give Al a lesson by carving 'Nina' out his skin with a scalpel she had brought with her so that Al would forever remember his victim.

Furthermore, what Al did is relevant to the argument that “men and boys who have sexist attitudes are more likely to be a perpetrator of gendered violence” (Azevado, 2019). This statement was proven when Al, who managed to free himself from one of his handcuffs, then silenced Cassie by smothering her with a pillow. The following scene shows the climax of his sexist trait manifested through his violence.



Figure 3. Al suffocates Cassie with a pillow

In Figure 3, the dark lighting around the room that was shot by the camera and the dim lighting centered around the bed create a focused impression of the bad things that are happening in the room. Al's violence appeared to be an attempt to cover up a mistake that he knew was wrong but was reluctant to admit out loud, and then he killed Cassie instead by suffocating her with a pillow. The scene above shows how frightening a situation between a man and a woman can be. Not to say that a woman is weak, but based on physical appearance, most men indeed appear preponderant than women. Cassie is after all defeated, and this is not surprising as it is explained that “regardless of the relative contributions of physical strength, evolutionary biology, and gender role stereotypes, both research and theory lead to the same prediction: women should indicate greater fearfulness than men when faced with a potentially dangerous situation or scenario” (Harris & Miller, 2000). Consequently, when a woman is in an unfavourable situation with a man, it is difficult for a woman to fight a man with her physical strength to free herself from the troubling situation. This problem happened to Cassie in that scene. While Al is handcuffed to the bed and unrestrained by anything, owing to his power, he can free himself, preventing Cassie from exposing his heinous actions and preserving the goodwill of his fiancé and other people. At the end of the film, the irony is that Al, who was a doctor, has violated his oath as a doctor. At this point, her efforts to oppose sexism and toxic masculinity do not last long as she has some limitations in accomplishing her mission.

3.3 Patriarchy

According to radical feminists, the patriarchal culture still dominates society and dehumanises women in various ways, including violence, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. In *Promising Young Woman* (2020), the patriarchal society is observed through the dean of their university, students, and even the legal system that did not take Nina's sexual assault case seriously.

The first person discussed is Dean Walker of Forrest University. Cassie met him to pretend to continue her medical studies. When they intentionally meet each other, Cassie is only there to bring up Nina's case, Dean Walker does not remember who Nina was. However, the dean could only remember Al Monroe, the apparent perpetrator, as a kind and intelligent person. Cassie discussed the Nina case that Dean Walker had handled before. Dean Walker, just like Maddison, did not trust Nina's side of the story. No defense support was provided for Nina, who instead got a denial of the charges for Dean Walker's best student at the time, Al Monroe. The following conversations show how Cassie fights to get justice for Nina.

Cassie : “You felt that there wasn’t sufficient evidence. You said there’s too much of a ‘He said’, ‘She said’ situation”

Dean : “We get accusation like this all the time. One or two a week,”

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Dean : “What would you have me do? Ruining a young man’s life every time we get an accusation like this?”

Cassie : “So you’re happy to take the boy’s word for it?”

Dean : “I have to give him the benefit of the doubt. Because innocent until proven guilty”

The dean's responses reinforce what Cassie has believed about the existence of inter-gender bias toward Al Monroe, a male medical student with a reputation for good attitude towards others when he is either inside or outside the university. Additionally, he is a smart and accomplished student, which makes it more difficult for others to believe Nina's assertion. Nina is an ordinary medical female student who, because of her gender identity, has been stereotyped at every corner, with people always thinking the woman is a male seducer and that "rape error" is the reward she gets for being a flirtatious woman. Patriarchy does exist in this toxic system. In this setting of the film, where men dominate the social hierarchy, their opinions are given priority. Thus, those in positions of authority tend to silence the opinions of women. Nevertheless, the stereotype against Nina is not veridical, with what Cassie, as her closest friend, knew all along about Nina's nature for being a good student.

Because Cassie still hears the same reasons about Nina's case, first Maddison and then Dean Walker, she also teaches Dean Walker the same lesson as she did Maddison. The revenge is that Cassie makes Dean Walker's child a victim by luring him to attend the invitation of his favourite boy band. By doing this, she shows how horrible it is for a woman or a loved one to be trapped in a similar situation that is almost the same as Nina's situation when someone raped her. What is radical about what Cassie did to Dean Walker is that she would re-enact treacherous things even to another woman, particularly one who has something to do with Nina. This is in line with the fact that "radical feminist aims to dismantle patriarchy rather than make adjustments to the system through legal changes" (Lewis, 2020). She solves the problem in her own way, even if it is the wrong way to judge people who were in the wrong.

The second person is Mr. Green, the lawyer of Al Monroe in the rape case. In order to achieve success as a lawyer, Mr. Green once threatened and bullied Nina in court until Nina was forced to drop the charges against Al. Because of the higher socioeconomic status of men, Mr. Green was used to being blinded by power and money at that time, so he justified any means necessary to ensure that most of his clients, who were men accused of being perpetrators of violence, would win and be free from punishment. What is shown here is relatable to the statement that "power is related to privilege. In a system in which men have more power than women, men have some level of privilege to which women are not entitled" (Napikoski, 2020).

The difference between the people that Cassie had planned to confront is that Mr. Green remembered who Nina was. That was shocking for Cassie because she had this image of him as this misogynistic man who had ruined a woman's life.



Figure 4. Mr. Green apologized for his behaviour

In Figure 4, the camera work focuses on the centre of the room, showing Cassie in the middle of the sofa, with Mr. Green kneeling in front of her. The reason behind his change of behavior is that Mr. Green is on sabbatical. He has had an epiphany that makes him regret his actions for his opponents whom he has wronged, including Nina. When Cassie asked if Mr. Green wanted to be hurt by her, Mr. Green resigned himself to accepting the offer to be hurt because he felt he deserved it. Cassie had originally prepared a hitman to torture Mr. Green, who was outside his house.



Figure 5. The Hitman

In actuality, Cassie despises Mr. Green the most because he hinders Nina from receiving equitable treatment and winning her case in court. That is why she has taken various kinds of revenge on the people who have ruined Nina's life, Mr. Green being the worst among them. He almost got the worst revenge by being tortured by a hitman. Fortunately, there is a deep sense of remorse in Mr. Green, as he had already paid for it through a deep depression that could not put him to sleep thinking about his past sins. Despite her feminine rage, she still has compassion for Mr. Green because there is still a principle of moral value. Moral principles aid in the development of human characteristics and personalities. Moral principles that should be inherited by a person include loyalty, integrity, truthfulness, honesty, willpower, and others. Collins (2015) asserted that "moral value of the attitudes might accompany the action" (Fitria, 2020). Loyalty to her friend still stands out, but the sense of pity overrides the loyalty. Therefore, Cassie withdraws the idea of the hitman and instead forgives him because she feels that Mr. Green's attitude is changing.

At the end of the story, Cassie was able to destroy the patriarchal system in this film, breaking down the domination of Al Monroe's power.



Figure 6. Al got arrested by the police

A man in power and control, if he ever felt threatened, would and could do anything to maintain a good reputation, as Cassie's radical feminism in this instance demonstrates, even if it meant getting his own hands dirty. The abolition of patriarchy is radically demonstrated by Cassie's sacrifice of her own life to be murdered to seek justice for Nina, knowing that with the evidence she had managed, it would be easier to charge Al with murder rather than rape. Hence, she was successful in getting Al sent to prison. In Figure 6, Al did not revolt because he knew he had committed a crime. The film shows the dreadfulness in his eyes. Joe, on the other hand, fled and did not turn back to assist Al after learning that the authorities had discovered the crime Al had committed. The toxic friendship between Joe and Al affected Al when Joe was not on his side as Al no longer has an enabler and therefore easily surrenders. The concept of patriarchy has been dismantled by radical feminism, which has also brought with it the toxicity that men or people have. What Cassie has done by giving her life in order to restore justice for women (and Nina) is a very feminist and radical thing because Cassie is willing to sacrifice herself to be one of the proofs of the crimes that men can commit against women. Her method has included being reckless and borderline unnatural in order to show examples of assaults on women.

CONCLUSION

Even though Cassie died at the end of the film, her death was not in vain. She managed to give Nina the victory of justice. The surprising end of her plan and her death give a sense of feminism. Because of her last fight, she was able to get justice for Nina and the right punishment for Al Monroe, the perpetrator of the rape. Even though Al was arrested for murder rather than rape, either way Al got what he deserved. This was the poetic justice depicted in *Promising Young Woman* (2020). According to the poetic definition of justice, the punishment of evil and the reward of virtue usually occurs in a unique or ironically fitting manner. Ironically, Cassie is dead, but with preparations ahead of time to frame Al, Cassie is able to give Al the punishment he deserves. Feminism in the film can be seen in the affectionate female relationship that Cassie has with Nina. Similarly, Cassie exemplifies a woman's perseverance and courage in her efforts to clean Nina's name as much as possible by fighting for justice for Nina by any means available.

Cassie's actions in the film were not only for Nina, but Cassie also became a representation of reality and raised awareness about sexual assault, which can be harmful to

people, particularly women. Similar to what happens to Nina in the film, if this issue is underestimated, it can cost a life. It has been previously stated that Cassie's actions do not appear to be radical because she dislikes men. This is still a common misconception in the portrayal of radical feminists. However, her rage at the injustices against women causes her to lose control. As a result, she does things that could be considered inappropriate. It is just that Cassie knows the true nature of any man who can harm a woman. The audience, particularly women, can have two reactions to this film. The majority support Cassie's radical actions as a femme fatale and her cleverness in handling illicit men. It demonstrates that radical feminism is accepted in dealing with these issues (as portrayed in the film). Others, on the other hand, wish that Cassie could handle justice issues differently so that she does not end up wasting her life and can enjoy the success of seeing the guilty men brought to justice. In conclusion, the film *Promising Young Woman* (2020) conveys a message about the lives of women in the 21st century and portrays a unique character that is very much in line with the characteristics of radical feminism.

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