

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Every human needs to socialize with others because humans are social beings and cannot live alone. However, some people are unable to socialize with their surroundings because they suffer from a certain mental health condition. Their mental disorder is known as Social Anxiety Disorder.

Social Anxiety Disorder (also called social phobia) refers to “a common type of anxiety disorder [which causes] a person . . . [to feel] symptoms of anxiety or fear in certain or all social situations” (“Social Anxiety Disorder: More Than Just Shyness”). There are several possible causes of Social Anxiety Disorder (later referred to as SAD), one of which is one’s negative experiences, such as teasing, bullying, family conflict, trauma, or abuse (“Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia”).

People with SAD might experience several emotional, behavioral, and physical symptoms when socializing with their surroundings (“Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia”). In terms of emotional symptoms, people with SAD might experience fear of situations in which they may be judged, worry about embarrassing or humiliating

themselves, intense fear of interacting or talking with strangers and fear that others will notice that they look anxious. In terms of behavioral symptoms, people with SAD might avoid interacting with unfamiliar people or strangers, being in situations where they might be the center of attention, attending parties or social gatherings, starting conversations, and making eye contact. People with SAD might also experience physical symptoms, such as blushing, having a fast heartbeat, trembling, sweating, and having an upset stomach or nausea (“Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)”).

Nevertheless, just like people with other illnesses, people with SAD also have a significant possibility to recover from the said condition. One factor that plays a key role in the recovery process is the continuous support from close friends. It is claimed that the right support from a few key people can help ones with SAD gather the courage to go outside their comfort zone and try something new (“Social Phobia (for Teens) - Nemours Kids Health”). Moreover, it is stated that those kind supports might also help socially anxious people counter their fears and allow them to have more positive expectations and perceptions on how people will respond to them (“Kindness May Help Socially Anxious People Relax, Says New Research by Dr. Lynn Alden”). This connection between SAD and the support from close friends is depicted in the novel that will be discussed in this study. The novel is entitled *Fangirl*, written by Rainbow Rowell.

Rainbow Rowell is an American author who writes mostly about realistic young adults’ problem in her works. Although she is relatively new in her career as a novelist, Rowell has been a columnist since she was young, and this contributes to her ability in producing attractive writing. Petra Mayer, an editor at NPR Books which focuses on fiction, states that Rowell’s writing “swings from profane to profound, but it’s always

real and always raw” (“Eleanor & Park”). Meanwhile, Publishers Weekly asserts that “Rowell keeps things surprising, and the solution — imperfect but believable — maintains the novel’s delicate balance of light and dark” (“Eleanor & Park”).

*Fangirl* is Rowell’s third novel which was published in 2013. Just like her other works, this novel is “[a] charming coming-of-age novel...filled with complex subjects (such as divorce, abandonment, and mental illness) handled in a realistic manner, and the writing effortlessly and seamlessly weaves these threads together” (“Fangirl: A Novel”).

The novel itself tells the story of a college freshman named Cath Avery, who suffers from SAD due to a traumatic childhood experience in which her parents divorced and her mother left her and her twin, Wren Avery. Having SAD, Cath is unable to interact well with people and instead choosing to spend her time reading and writing fanfiction of Simon Snow series as a way of dealing with her traumatic experience. Nevertheless, at the end of the story, Cath is eventually able to overcome her SAD thanks to the help of her college friends.

Based on the summary of the novel above, it can be seen that the author wants to convey a certain message to the readers through the depiction of Cath Avery as the main character. Thus, the most suitable element to be discussed in this novel is the theme, which will be drawn from the portrayal of the protagonist. In literature, theme is defined as “a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work, which may be stated directly or indirectly” (“Theme”). Meanwhile, the word portrayal refers to “a depiction of someone or something in a work of art or literature; a picture” (“Portrayal”) whereas the word protagonist refers to “the central character or leading figure in poetry, narrative, novel or any other story” (“Protagonist”). The protagonist herself is depicted

as a dynamic character, which refers to a character that “undergoes changes throughout the narrative, due to conflicts he encounters on his journey” (“Dynamic Character”).

As the information needed to analyze the theme is already in the novel itself, this study is conducted using formalism approach. Formalism approach refers to “a literary approach that looks closely at the work itself, analyzing the various elements of the work as a way of explicating or interpreting a text” (“Types of Literary Criticism”).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems I am going to discuss in this study are:

1. What is the theme of the novel?
2. How does the portrayal of the protagonist help in revealing the theme?

### **Purpose of the Study**

Based on the statement of the problems above, this study is conducted:

1. to show the theme of the novel;
2. to show how the portrayal of the protagonist helps in revealing the theme.

### **Method of Research**

I conduct this study using the library research method. I start the process by reading the novel, Rainbow Rowell’s *Fangirl*, first and searching for some information, especially regarding Social Anxiety Disorder, that can support my analysis. Next, I analyse the protagonist’s characteristics and draw the theme from those characteristics while comparing them with the information I have obtained previously. Finally, I draw some conclusions from the findings.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of three main chapters. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains the analysis of theme through portrayal of the protagonist in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* while Chapter Three is Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, consisting of Synopsis of *Fangirl* and Biography of Rainbow Rowell.

