Anaphora:
Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies

ISSN: 2656-3957 (ONLINE)
Volume 09 Number 01 July 2026
Page 145-157
DOI: doi.org/10.30996/anaphora.v9i1.133827

Behind the Silence: Cath Avery's Social Anxiety Disorder in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*

Anik Cahyaning Rahayu[a,1*], Sudarwati Sudarwati[a,2]
[a)] Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia
[1)] anikcahyaning@untag-sby.ac.id ; [2)] sudarwati@untag-sby.ac.id
corresponding author: Anik Cahyaning Rahayu

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) experienced by Cath Avery, the protagonist of Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* (2013). Previous studies have predominantly interpreted Cath's psychological condition through psychoanalytic perspectives, with limited attention given to contemporary cognitive approaches. Therefore, this study aims to identify the symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder exhibited by Cath, investigate the psychological and environmental factors contributing to her anxiety, and examine its effects on her personal development, interpersonal relationships, and identity formation. This research employs a qualitative descriptive design using a literary psychology approach. The primary data consist of narrative passages, dialogues, and internal monologues analyzed through textual analysis. The analysis is guided by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) developed by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck, complemented by Carl Jung's Analytical Psychology. The findings reveal that Cath exhibits major symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder, including fear of social interaction, avoidance behaviour, negative self-evaluation, automatic negative thoughts, and physiological anxiety responses. These symptoms are influenced by emotional dependence on her twin sister, maternal abandonment, and difficulties adapting to university life. Furthermore, her anxiety significantly affects her academic adjustment, social relationships, emotional well-being, and identity development. This study contributes to literary psychology by demonstrating how contemporary fiction realistically represents Social Anxiety Disorder through the integration of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Jung's Analytical Psychology

Keywords: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Jungian Psychology, Social Anxiety Disorder

Submitted:	Accepted:	Published:
14 July 2026	4 August 2026	5 August 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety disorder or social phobia is a long-term mental health disorder that is presented by acute fear of socializing and persistent social phobia that manifests itself due to the fear of negative evaluation. This lack of order is evidently seen in literary stories in such a way that characters are represented being in a state of inner turmoil which reflects true mental distress. *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell furnishes one of the brightest examples, with the protagonist, Cath Avery, displaying social dysfunction in her behaviour and spiritual fear of communicating with people resembling the pattern of a clinical case of social anxiety (Anténe, 2022). All these symptoms, such as the compulsive avoidance of social situations, emotional dependence on her twin sister, and the obsessive consumption of fan fiction writing, indicate the main problem that Cath is struggling with self-acceptance and social performance (Rumatiga & Pramesti, 2023). In spite of the existence of such patterns in the novel, the existing studies tend to refer to Cath's behaviour as generalized anxiety or introversion and fail to considerably consider the specificity of her symptoms in regard to the established criteria of social anxiety disorder (Joyce, 2024). The misclassification has led to a research gap that the research will help to fill.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

The fanfare of the mental health concerns is gaining popularity in the contemporary fiction as writers attempt to depict the psychological reality of people living in the modern world (Fuchs & Phillips, 2026). The main character of Rainbow Rowell in *Fangirl*, Cath Avery displays symptoms that are common to social anxiety issue, including being afraid of socializing with new people and new surroundings, privacy and avoidance tendencies, and emotional detachment (Vinothini, 2025). Nevertheless, to comprehend the complexity of her condition, one will have to examine the particular symptoms that she has, as well as the causes of her condition found in both her psychological and in her environmental experiences, and the bigger consequences that her anxiety has on her daily life and personal development. This study focuses on analyzing the symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder experienced by Cath Avery in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*, the psychological and environmental factors contributing to Cath Avery's Social Anxiety Disorder in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*, and the effects of Social Anxiety Disorder on Cath Avery's personal development, interpersonal relationships, and identity formation in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*.

There have been several studies on anxiety from different disciplinary angles, which have shown that anxiety is a complex phenomenon that is manifested in literature as psychological, social and cultural experience. Anxiety has not only been studied in clinical psychology but also as a symptom of social reality and existential issues (Rozen & Aderka, 2023). This diversity offers an important basis for the comprehension of how literary texts depict various types of anxiety and for further research.

Some other researchers have concentrated on the anxiety of literary characters. Cherilla and Ekalestari (2024) examine the work of Osamu Dazai, No Longer Human, and discuss the different sources and manifestations of anxiety caused by traumatic experiences, internal conflict, and social relationship issues. They conclude that literary works can represent complex psychological conditions well by the characters' thoughts and behaviours. Their study, however, does not focus on a particular anxiety disorder, but rather on anxiety in general, using contemporary psychological theories.

In general, the previous studies show that anxiety has been studied broadly in literary research in psychoanalytical, cultural and psychological aspects. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring Cath Avery's anxiety using the framework of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as developed by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck, along with Jung's analytical psychology. This study combines modern clinical psychology with literary analysis to gain a more holistic perspective of Cath Avery's psychological state and to expand the conversation on mental health in modern literature. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by examining Cath Avery's anxiety through the framework of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy developed by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck, complemented by Jung's analytical psychology. By integrating contemporary clinical psychology with literary analysis, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of Cath Avery's psychological condition while contributing to broader discussions of mental health representation in contemporary literature.

The majority of studies have focused on unconscious conflict, defence mechanisms, or personality development to explain Cath's behaviour, and the cognitive processes involved in her fear of social interaction, avoidance behaviour, and negative self-evaluation have not been fully explored. As a result, there is still limited understanding of how *Fangirl* represents social anxiety in ways that correspond to contemporary psychological knowledge.

This gap is significant because Social Anxiety Disorder is one of the most prevalent anxiety disorders among adolescents and young adults, and can negatively impact academic functioning, interpersonal relationships, and psychological functioning (Hofmann, 2020). The novel offers a meaningful literary context for the examination of how symptoms of social anxiety are depicted in fictional narratives, given that *Fangirl* is a novel about a first-year university student who has a hard time adjusting to a new social environment. These representations help not only in literary criticism,

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

but also in the general discussion of mental health awareness and the role of literature in reflecting actual psychological experiences.

This study is novel because of its interdisciplinary approach. This research is different from previous research, which was mostly psychoanalytical, in that it uses the framework of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) developed by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck to analyse Cath Avery's experiences and then adds Jung's analytical psychology to analyse issues of identity formation and emotional development. This method allows the study to not only account for the symbolic nature of Cath's actions, but also for the cognitive processes that underlie her anxiety, such as negative automatic thoughts, maladaptive beliefs, avoidance behaviours, and challenges with adapting to new social settings (Beck, 2021).

While there is some research that has shed light on Cath Avery's psychological state, there are a number of gaps in the research. The focus of previous research on *Fangirl*, such as studies by Harahap and Ningsih (2022) and Nishanthi and Rajathi (2024), as well as Deepa (2022), Rumatiga and Pramesti (2023), and Joyce (2024), is primarily on Cath's character using Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis or broad personality frameworks, which involve unconscious conflicts, personality formation, familial causes, and introversion. Furthermore, while Vinothini (2025) addresses how Cath's anxiety and introversion hinder her identity development using attachment theory, these studies do not specifically examine her as a case of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) from a contemporary clinical psychology perspective. Similarly, research on anxiety in other literary works, such as Cherilla and Ekalestari's (2024) study on *No Longer Human*, along with Fanani *et al.* (2025) on *The Goldfinch*, Wulan and Sahri (2024) on *Finding Audrey*, and Seda and Supsiadji (2023) on *Starfish*, mostly relies on psychoanalytic theories to explore anxiety as a general psychological state categorized into neurotic or realistic types, rather than focusing on the cognitive and behavioural symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder. Although studies like Demir (2026) have begun evaluating the behavioural and cognitive-emotional symptoms of social anxiety in young adult literature, and Rozen and Aderka (2023) highlight the importance of cognitive behavioral models in understanding SAD, little research has been conducted that uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to describe the role that maladaptive beliefs, automatic negative thoughts, and avoidance behaviours play in the development and maintenance of Cath Avery's anxiety. In addition, the relationship between Cath's anxiety, her identity development, and the impact of anxiety on her academic adjustment and interpersonal relationships have been relatively under-researched. The present study aims to close these gaps by exploring Cath Avery's Social Anxiety Disorder using the lenses of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck with the addition of Jung's Analytical Psychology. This study aims to combine a modern clinical view with literary analysis to gain a broader understanding of the symptoms, causes, and effects of Social Anxiety Disorder as presented in the novel, *Fangirl*, by Rainbow Rowell.

Hence, this research aims to connect literary analysis with the current psychological understanding of the condition of Social Anxiety Disorder by analyzing the portrayal of the condition in the novel, *Fangirl*, by the author, Rainbow Rowell. The research will make a significant contribution to literary psychology by offering a more complete understanding of Cath Avery's psychological state, as well as adding to the body of knowledge regarding mental health in modern literature. This study will attempt to: (1) identify and analyze the symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder that Cath Avery demonstrates; (2) explore the psychological and environmental factors that may have led to the development of her social anxiety disorder; and (3) discuss the impact of social anxiety on her personal development, interpersonal relationships, and identity formation.

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design using literary psychology as its primary analytical approach. Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social or human phenomena through the interpretation of textual or narrative data (Creswell, 2018). The study aims to explore and understand the psychological experiences of Cath Avery as depicted in the novel, *Fangirl* (2013) by Rainbow Rowell, which makes qualitative descriptive research the appropriate method. The researcher uses literary psychology to examine the character's thoughts, feelings, actions, and relationships with others by applying psychological theories to literary works. Psychological literary criticism is a method that allows researchers to examine fictional characters using the theories of psychology, which will give a better understanding of the psychological state of the characters (Thompson, 2017). This study uses the lenses of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck, and Jung's Analytical Psychology to analyze the symptoms, causes, and effects of Cath Avery's Social Anxiety Disorder as it is presented in the novel's narrative, dialogue, and characterization (Jung, 1970).

The data source of this study is Rainbow Rowell's novel *Fangirl* (2013). The novel was chosen because the main character, Cath Avery, consistently demonstrates behaviours, thoughts and emotional reactions that mirror the characteristics of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) including fear of social interaction, avoidance of unfamiliar situations, negative self-evaluation, and problems adjusting to a new social environment. In addition, the novel's narrative descriptions, dialogues, and inner thoughts provide a detailed examination of Cath's psychological experiences. The data are narrative passages, dialogues, and internal monologues that depict Cath Avery's psychological experiences. The research is specifically about Social Anxiety Disorder, so purposive sampling is used to select textual evidence that is directly relevant to the research objectives. The chosen data consist of scenes that represent social avoidance, fear of negative evaluation, emotional distress, interpersonal problems, maladaptive thought patterns, and other behaviors that are related to Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) (Creswell, 2018).

Textual analysis was used to collect data. The novel was read aloud several times to develop a full understanding of the story and Cath Avery's character development. Then, sentences with descriptions of Cath's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and interactions with others related to social anxiety were identified and highlighted. The selected excerpts were then arranged in a data classification table that included three analytical categories: symptoms, causes and effects of Social Anxiety Disorder. This systematic organization made subsequent analysis easier, and at the same time it ensured that all the data collected met the research goals (Krippendorff, 2018).

The data obtained were analyzed using textual analysis. Textual analysis is the process of examining and interpreting a text to understand how its language, details, structure, and context create meaning (Walsh, 2016). It involves carefully questioning every aspect of a text and using textual evidence to support interpretations (Walsh, 2016). The selected passages were interpreted by closely analysing Cath Avery's thoughts, dialogues, behaviours and interactions with the research objectives. The analysis was limited to finding textual evidence for symptoms, causes, and effects of Social Anxiety Disorder. The results were then analyzed in terms of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) created by Beck (2021), along with Jung (1970) with his analytical psychology, to interpret how the novel depicts Cath Avery's psychological state. First, relevant passages that capture Cath Avery's psychological experiences were identified. Second, the collected data were categorized into three thematic areas: symptoms, causes, and effects of Social Anxiety Disorder. Third, the interpretation of each category was done with the theoretical frameworks used in this study. CBT was used to explain how Cath's maladaptive beliefs, automatic negative thoughts, cognitive distortions and avoidance behaviours contribute to her anxiety (Beck, 2021). Later, Jung's Analytical Psychology was used to analyse Cath's

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

identity formation, emotional growth, persona and creative expression throughout the novel (Jung, 1970). Lastly, the results of both theoretical approaches were combined to understand how the Social Anxiety Disorder is depicted in *Fangirl* and how literary narratives can depict complex psychological experiences.

Although this study has offered a detailed analysis of Cath Avery's psychological state, there are some limitations. First, the analysis is restricted to one literary work and one main character, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other literary texts. Secondly, the study is based on textual interpretation, so the results are based on the researcher's interpretation and will have interpretative limitations in qualitative literary research.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

This section will provide the results of the text analysis of the book *Fangirl* (2013) by Rainbow Rowell. The results are presented in relation to the three research questions: (1) What symptoms did Cath Avery experience with S.A.D., (2) What were some of the causes of her anxiety, and (3) What were the effects of her anxiety on her personal and social life? The following excerpts are the most important textual evidence of Cath's psychological experiences throughout the novel.

3.1.1 Symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder Experienced by Cath Avery

The findings show that Cath Avery exhibits a few common symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder in *Fangirl*. These symptoms impact her interactions with new people, her socialization, and her adjustment to the university environment. The results indicate that Cath is often afraid of social interaction, avoids it, worries about being negatively judged and suffers from emotional distress when faced with new environments. One of the most obvious symptoms is persistent avoidance behaviour. Cath usually does not approach strangers, engage in campus activities or start conversations, even when it would benefit her to do so in order to make the transition to university life. She would rather be alone or deal with things on her own rather than ask for help from other students when she is uncomfortable.

"I don't know where the dining hall is." (Rowell, 2013, p. 26). Cath doesn't know the campus, but she doesn't ask for directions from the other students and avoids social interaction. This same behaviour is seen when she is in class and also in her room in the dormitory, where she restricts her interactions with those she doesn't know well and prefers to stay in her room instead of interacting with others. The results also show that Cath has ongoing concerns about being judged negatively. She often questions herself and fears that her normal interactions will lead to embarrassment or rejection. These worries cause her to be reluctant to voice her opinions, make new friends, and engage in new social interactions. Furthermore, Cath's anxiety is also accompanied by discomfort in her body when she is in crowded or unfamiliar environments. "Cath felt under siege in her empty dorm room. Shouting. Laughing. Music. All of it coming from every direction." (Rowell, 2013, p. 10). This quotation shows how much Cath was affected by the new environment at university at the start of her college career. The same feelings come up again and again in the novel when she must interact with strangers.

3.1.2 Causes of Cath Avery's Social Anxiety

The findings show that there are personal and environmental experiences throughout *Fangirl* that are correlated with Cath Avery's social anxiety. The results indicate that her anxiety is the result of a mix of family factors, emotional dependency and the difficulties of adjusting to a new social setting. These are factors that are repeated throughout the novel and shape Cath's reactions to new scenarios. The most obvious one is Cath's emotional reliance on her twin sister Wren. The sisters lived

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

together for most of their lives before university, and were seldom apart. Cath was used to using Wren in social situations and it was hard for her to go to university without him.

"Before... everyone knew that if you invited Wren, you got Cath. They were a package deal..." (Rowell, 2013, p. 106). The passage indicates that Cath and Wren had a strong bond as children and teens. Once at university, Cath must deal with new people and new circumstances on her own, which she has not encountered before. One of the other factors is the lack of Cath's mother. Cath's recollection of her mother's leaving the family is a recurring theme throughout the novel, and it is a significant aspect of her emotional life. The separation has a negative impact on her family dynamics and it continues to impact her thoughts and emotions once she starts college. The findings also indicate that the move from home to university is a factor in Cath's anxiety. She has to adjust to new classmates, new routines, new surroundings, and it is hard for her to manage. "Cath felt under siege in her empty dorm room. Shouting. Laughing. Music. All of it coming from every direction." (Rowell, 2013, p. 10). The quotation shows how Cath responded to her new surroundings at the start of university. This happens again and again in the novel, when she finds herself in new classrooms, new places, new social situations.

3.1.3 Effects of Social Anxiety on Cath's Life

The results indicate that Cath's social anxiety impacts her academic adjustment, interpersonal relationships and personal development. Persistent avoidance behaviour is one of the major effects. Cath rarely joins in with campus activities or gets involved with the classmates, preferring to stay in her dormitory. This pattern restricts opportunities for friendship building and adjustment to the university environment. Another effect is her reliance on familiar relationships, especially her emotional bond with Wren. Cath tries to reach her sister over and over again when she gets overwhelmed, even after starting college.

"Thinking about Wren now made Cath reach for her phone." (Rowell, 2013, p. 10). This behaviour is an example of Cath's need for familiar emotional support in stressful situations. The results also show that Cath's anxiety has an impact on her self-confidence. She is often self-doubting, concerned about making mistakes, and believes that others are judging her poorly. These thoughts make her less likely to join in with the class, to meet new people, or to try new things. The novel does show some changes in Cath's behaviour, however, despite these difficulties. As she interacts with Levi, Reagan, and others, she gradually becomes more open to communicating with others and confronting situations she had previously avoided. Her growth is slow, but these changes suggest a growing sense of confidence and emotional development throughout the story. Overall, the results show that Cath Avery has several symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder. These symptoms are shaped by family experiences, emotional dependency, and environmental transitions, and they impact her social, academic, and personal growth. The results of these findings are used as a basis for the discussion in the following sections.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Discussion of Symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder Experienced by Cath Avery

The results show that Cath Avery consistently has symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) in *Fangirl*. The novel does not simply describe Cath as being shy or introverted, but instead depicts a pattern of fear of social interaction, avoidance behaviour, excessive concern about negative evaluation, and emotional distress that interferes with her daily functioning. The results indicate that Rainbow Rowell presents Cath's psychological experiences in a way that is similar to the clinical features of S.A.D. as outlined in current psychological literature. This means that Cath's behaviour is

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

not just a personality characteristic, but a way of thinking, feeling and acting that is consistent in various social situations.

The present results are in line with the cognitive model of anxiety proposed by Beck and Clark (2010) stating that people with anxiety disorders are more likely to perceive potential threats as more severe than they are to perceive their coping resources as being more capable of dealing with them. The persistent symptoms found in this study suggest that Cath often views normal social interactions as threatening and avoids social interactions when there is little actual danger. This pattern is considered from a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) perspective as maladaptive cognitive appraisals that help to maintain anxiety. Repeated avoidance reduces opportunities for Cath to disconfirm her fears, and instead, limits her exposure to corrective social experiences, which sustains her anxious responses over time. These results lend support to the Beck and Clark's position that avoidance is not simply a symptom of anxiety, but also a way in which anxiety disorders are maintained.

The results also align with the explanation provided by Judith Beck (2021) that people with Social Anxiety Disorder tend to have dysfunctional core beliefs and automatic negative thoughts about their own competence and others' judgments. The consistent symptoms that are seen in Cath's behaviour suggest that her social interactions are always driven by negative thoughts, feelings and expectations of embarrassment, rejection or criticism. These thought patterns are part of the reason for the novel's many moments in which she finds herself in an ordinary situation that becomes a stressful one for her. The present study thus shows that Cath's anxiety is not only maintained by external factors but also by the constant negative interpretations of social experiences. This interpretation offers a systematic explanation of Cath's behavioural patterns by connecting the recurring symptoms that are found in the novel with the cognitive processes that are described in modern CBT.

The current study corroborates and builds on prior research on *Fangirl*. Harahap and Ningsih (2022) used Freudian psychoanalysis to explain Cath Avery's psychological issues, which they believed stemmed from conflicts between the id, the ego, and the superego. Their study is a good insight into Cath's unconscious motivations and emotional instability, and how internal psychological conflict forms Cath's personality throughout the novel. Likewise, Nishanthi and Rajathi (2024) explored Cath's experiences from a Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical lens, focusing on her introversion, defence mechanisms, and reliance on fanfiction writing as a psychological coping mechanism. Both studies provide insight into Cath's inner life, examining unconscious psychological processes and symbolism in Cath's behaviour.

These interpretations provide valuable insights, but the results of the present study indicate that Cath's behaviour can be understood in a more modern clinical context. This study shows that her silence, withdrawal and fear of social interaction are not only symptoms of unconscious conflict, but they are also symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder that are described in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The present study uses CBT to describe how Cath's maladaptive beliefs, negative automatic thoughts, and avoidance behaviours work together to keep her anxious in various social situations. This research therefore adds to the previous psychoanalytical interpretations by offering a psychological explanation based on the contemporary clinical theories. This wider view shows that literary characters can be understood in several different psychological ways, and that each of these ways provides some different but complementary insights into human behavior.

The results also align with the research conducted by Cherilla and Ekalestari (2024) on the anxiety in the novel No Longer Human by Osamu Dazai. Their study shows that anxiety affects interpersonal relations, emotional stability and the perception of literary characters. Similarly, the present study indicates that Cath's psychological experiences are not limited to the immediate discomfort of her emotions, but that they are always present and affect her interactions in the university setting. But

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

there is an important difference in the scope of analysis. Cherilla and Ekalestari mainly focus on anxiety as a general psychological state, while the current study focuses on the behavioural and cognitive features of Social Anxiety Disorder. This more focused perspective adds to the conceptual precision by connecting Cath's experiences to a specific clinical condition, rather than anxiety in general.

3.2.2 Discussion of Causes of Cath Avery's Social Anxiety

The results suggest that the development of Cath Avery's Social Anxiety Disorder is a result of multiple personal and environmental experiences, not just one. The findings show that family environment, emotional reliance on her twin sister and the transition from home to university all play a role in the formation of her anxiety. Cath's experiences occur over and over again and influence her perceptions of unfamiliar situations, indicating that her anxiety is not just a response to new environments, but is the result of psychological patterns that have been established over time and influence how she interprets social experiences.

This interpretation is aligned with the cognitive model of Beck and Clark (2010) that suggests that anxiety disorders are sustained by the existence of dysfunctional cognitive schemas that are shaped by important life experiences. This model suggests that negative self- and world beliefs develop as a result of emotionally upsetting experiences. These beliefs then shape how people think about future events, and they see normal social interactions as threatening instead of neutral. This is supported by the results of the present study, which indicate that the experiences of Cath's family and her emotional insecurity influence her expectations of rejection, discomfort, and failure in new social situations. As a result, her reactions to the university experience are not just emotional but also cognitive.

The results also align with Judith Beck's (2021) theory that early emotional experiences shape dysfunctional core beliefs that then trigger automatic negative thoughts when people face situations similar to the early emotional experiences. In this study, the recurring causes suggested that Cath always sees herself and others in a negative light when she encounters new social situations. These interpretations further contribute to her lack of social interaction and make it more difficult for her to adapt to new environments. Cath's behaviour is not necessarily in response to what happens in everyday life, but rather is based on assumptions that affect her emotional and behavioural reactions throughout the novel.

The other significant finding is related to the association between environmental transition and current cognitive vulnerability. While going to university is a universal experience for many young adults, the results indicate that Cath goes through it differently as it triggers her pre-existing emotional insecurities. In a CBT framework, environmental change acts as a cue that elicits maladaptive beliefs that have been learned in the past. Thus, the present results indicate that the anxiety of Cath is not solely due to the difficulties of university life. Rather, her adjustment problems arise when she experiences earlier emotional events and the new social demands, which shows how cognitive vulnerability and environmental stressors interact in the development of Social Anxiety Disorder.

The present results corroborate and build on past research on Cath Avery's psychological state in *Fangirl*. Harahap and Ningsih (2022) analyzed Cath's emotional problems using Freudian psychoanalysis, which suggests that the emotional problems that arise in Cath are the result of conflict between the id, ego, and superego. Their study suggests that Cath's emotional instability is due to her unconscious psychological processes affecting her behaviour and decision-making throughout the novel. Similarly, Nishanthi and Rajathi (2024) used Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical theories to analyse Cath's personality development, focusing on her introversion,

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

defence mechanisms, and reliance on fanfiction writing as psychological coping mechanisms. In both studies, Cath's experiences are seen to be tightly linked to her psychological growth in relation to her family and her internal emotional struggles.

While these psychoanalytical interpretations are useful in understanding Cath's personality, the present study takes a different approach by analysing the source of her anxiety using the lens of the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This study shows that Cath's anxiety is not just a result of unconscious conflict, but is a result of dysfunctional beliefs, negative cognitive patterns and emotionally significant life experiences. Family disruption, emotional reliance on Wren, and moving to university are seen as events that help develop and trigger maladaptive beliefs about social situations. This view adds to the previous psychoanalytical research by offering a clinically relevant account of how past experiences continue to affect Cath's understanding of new situations and keep her anxious over time. The present results, therefore, extend the current understanding of *Fangirl* to the field of contemporary cognitive psychology.

The results are also consistent with the research conducted by Cherilla and Ekalestari (2024) on anxiety in *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai. They find that traumatic experiences, interpersonal problems, and emotional conflict all contribute to the development of anxiety, which affects the psychological development of literary characters. Likewise, the current study reveals that family experiences and environmental transition are significant factors related to Cath's anxiety. But the two studies have different analytical emphases. In the present study, anxiety is discussed as a psychological phenomenon, whereas Cherilla and Ekalestari discuss anxiety as a broad psychological phenomenon. This distinction offers conceptual specificity in explaining how specific life experiences relate to the development and maintenance of clinically recognizable social anxiety as opposed to anxiety in general.

3.2.3 Discussion of Effects of Social Anxiety on Cath's Life

The results show that Social Anxiety Disorder has a significant impact on Cath Avery's academic adjustment, interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and personal development during *Fangirl*. The disorder does not just impact on social interactions, but also on how Cath experiences new situations, interacts with others and sees herself as she moves into university life. The findings indicate that her anxiety has a broader impact than just causing temporary nervousness, affecting various areas of her life. From this, Cath's experiences show that Social Anxiety Disorder can impact an individual's ability to adapt successfully to major life changes, and can also have a long-term impact on psychological development.

The results are consistent with the Beck and Clark (2010) model of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which suggests that avoidance behaviour is one of the main mechanisms that underpins anxiety disorders. This model suggests that people who avoid situations they fear will have a brief respite from anxiety, but will miss out on opportunities to learn that many social situations are not as threatening as they may have thought. This, over time, leads to the reinforcement of maladaptive beliefs and anxious expectations, which leads to avoidance. The current results confirm this, as Cath was less likely to engage in social interaction, start conversations or approach new environments, which reduces her chances of gaining confidence in social interaction. Repeated avoidance does not help to decrease her anxiety permanently, but rather helps to maintain the cycle of thinking that is associated with Social Anxiety Disorder.

The results also align with the explanation of Judith Beck (2021) that dysfunctional beliefs and automatic negative thoughts affect emotional responses as well as an individual's functioning and social interactions. Individuals with Social Anxiety Disorder may have the skills to perform well in school or social situations, but they are unable to perform them well because of their fear of being

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

negatively evaluated. The present results suggest that Cath's anxiety impacts her involvement in classroom activities, her ability to make new friends, and her ability to express her ideas despite her intellectual ability and creative talent. The results indicate that the competence of Cath is not the problem; rather, it is the way she thinks about herself in social contexts that is the issue.

Another important discovery is the slow psychological growth of Cath throughout the novel. While the impact of Social Anxiety Disorder is still present throughout most of the story, the results show that supportive interpersonal relationships and repeated exposure to new situations lead to significant improvements in her behaviour. A CBT approach would suggest that the gradual approach to situations that had been avoided would give the opportunity to question the negative thoughts and beliefs, and establish more positive ones. Thus, the present results indicate that Cath's personal growth is not due to the total absence of anxiety, but rather to her growing capacity to function in the presence of ongoing psychological difficulties. The development of psychological change is illustrated throughout the novel, with this progression showing that recovery is presented as a gradual process of adaptation, rather than an instant solution to anxiety.

The results of the present study corroborate and build upon previous research that has investigated Cath Avery's psychological journey in *Fangirl*. According to Harahap and Ningsih (2022), Cath's emotional issues are rooted in the interplay between the id, ego, and superego, highlighting the unconscious psychological factors that influence her actions. According to their psychoanalytical interpretation, Cath's emotional instability and internal conflict is a result of conflicting psychological forces. Likewise, Nishanthi and Rajathi (2024) use Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis to examine Cath's character, revealing her introversion, defense mechanisms, and reliance on fanfiction as coping mechanisms to help her deal with emotional distress. These studies are able to account for Cath's psychological development in a successful way, focusing on the role of unconscious motivation and personality development.

The present study extends the work of these studies by exploring the impact of Cath's anxiety on her daily functioning, which is related to Social Anxiety Disorder. The results indicate that Cath's anxiety is not just a psychological struggle between her thoughts and feelings, but has a significant impact on her academic adjustment, interpersonal relationships, emotional independence and identity development within the framework of the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. In this study, the primary focus is not on the unconscious processes, but on the maladaptive cognitive patterns and avoidance behaviours that affect Cath's functioning in university life and in forming meaningful relationships. The present results therefore support previous psychoanalytic interpretations by showing that Cath's psychological problems can be interpreted as the behavioural manifestation of a clinically recognised anxiety disorder. This view extends the interpretation of *Fangirl* to include literary analysis and modern psychological theory.

The results are also consistent with the study conducted by Cherilla and Ekalestari (2024) on the anxiety of *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai. They found that anxiety affects the emotional stability, social interaction and overall psychological development of literary characters. Similarly, the present study shows that Cath's anxiety is not limited to individual emotional experiences, but rather impacts a variety of aspects of her life. The present study, however, is unique because it examines the long-term impact of the disorder of Social Anxiety Disorder on academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and personal development. This research offers a more detailed account of the effects of chronic anxiety on the daily functioning and developmental process of an individual by looking at these broader consequences from a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy perspective. The study thus adds more conceptual specificity than studies focusing on anxiety as a general psychological state.

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the representation of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) in the novel *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell, using the theories of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) by Aaron T. Beck and Judith S. Beck, alongside Carl Jung's Analytical Psychology. The analysis was based on three research objectives: symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder, factors that led to Cath's anxiety and the impact of the disorder on her personal development, interpersonal relationships and identity formation. The results indicate that Cath has a number of symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder, such as high levels of fear of social interaction, avoidance of unfamiliar situations, negative self-evaluation, constant worry about being judged by others, and physiological symptoms of nervousness, tension and inability to control her emotions. Throughout the novel, these symptoms are consistently present and show that her anxiety is not just a normal shyness or introversion. Rather, the novel depicts anxiety as a constant psychological state that impacts her thinking and behavior.

The analysis also suggests that there are multiple psychological and environmental factors that contribute to Cath's anxiety. The loss of her mother, emotional reliance on her twin sister Wren, and the shift from home to college all play a role in shaping her negative self-perceptions and insecurities. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) views these experiences as reinforcing negative automatic thoughts and avoidance behaviours that can sustain anxiety over time. As Cath learns to make decisions and build relationships without relying on others, Jung's idea of individuation can be used to explain her gradual process of emotional independence and identity development. In addition, the results show that the Social Anxiety Disorder has a significant impact on Cath's academic adjustment, interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and personal growth. While her anxiety at first hampers her involvement in the university community and diminishes her self-assurance in social settings, the novel also shows that positive psychological growth can be fostered through supportive relationships and repeated social experiences. Cath's story shows that it is possible to grow despite experiencing anxiety as a part of their emotional life.

In general, this study adds to literary psychology by showing that the social anxiety disorder can be depicted in contemporary fiction in a manner that is very similar to contemporary psychological knowledge. This research demonstrates that Cath Avery's anxiety can be explained more fully by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and that Jung's Analytical Psychology can enhance the interpretation of her identity formation and emotional development, as opposed to previous studies which have mainly interpreted Cath Avery through psychoanalytical lenses.

This study is limited to the analysis of one literary work and one central character. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to examine the representation of Social Anxiety Disorder in other contemporary literary works to determine whether similar cognitive and behavioural patterns appear across different narratives and cultural contexts. Comparative studies involving multiple novels or authors may also provide broader insights into how anxiety disorders are represented in literature. Future research may also expand the theoretical perspective by integrating other contemporary psychological approaches, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), attachment theory, or trauma-informed psychology, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of anxiety in literary characters. In addition, researchers may investigate how literary representations of mental health contribute to readers' awareness, empathy, and understanding of psychological disorders, thereby strengthening the interdisciplinary connection between literature and mental health studies.

REFERENCES

Anténe, P. (2022). On writing and college life: Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* as a campus novel. *East-West Cultural Passage*, *22*(1), 100–114. https://doi.org/10.2478/ewcp-2022-0005

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

Beck, A. T., & Clark, D. A. (2010). Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: Science and Practice. The Guilford Press. https://www.terapia-cognitiva.mx/pdf_files/2Semestre/teoria-y-tratamiento-transtornos-ansiedad/recursos/%5BDavid_A._Clark_Phd,_Aaron_T._Beck_MD%5D_Cognitive_T(BookFi.org).pdf

Beck, J. S. (2021). Cognitive Behaviour Therapy: Basics and Beyond (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=yb_nDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright&hl=id

Cherilla, L., & Ekalestari, S. (2024). Anxiety causes and forms in Osamu Dazai's novel No Longer Human. Journal of Language, 6(1), 177–191. https://jurnal.uisu.ac.id/index.php/journaloflanguage

Creswell, J. W. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://books.google.com/books/about/Research_Design.html?hl=id&id=s4ViswEACAAJ

Deepa, M. (2022). INTROVERTED AND ANXIETY DISORDER OF CATH AVERY IN RAINBOW ROWELL'S *FANGIRL*. *Towards Excellence*, 541–546. https://doi.org/10.37867/te140351

Demir, N. (2026). Challenge of existence: social anxiety in Finding Audrey. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2026.2612722

Fanani, A., Sodiq, M. M., Rohim, F., Syaikhu, A., & Thoriqussuud, M. (2025). Anxiety disorder in Donna Tartt's The Goldfinch. *INTERACTION Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, *12*(1), 223–236. https://doi.org/10.36232/interactionjournal.v12i1.55

Fuchs, M., & Phillips, M. (2026). Monstrous reproduction, monstrous evolution, and extinction anxiety in Steve Alten's MEG books. Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2026.2616266

Harahap, N. A., & Ningsih, A. M. (2022). Psychoanalysis of the main character in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*. Philology Journal of English Language and Literature, 2(2). https://www.mendeley.com/catalogue/8c5f638e-dfee-31b6-8fb9-0b23dabcb5f7

Hofmann, S. G. (2020). The anxiety skills workbook: Simple CBT and mindfulness strategies for overcoming anxiety, fear, and worry. New Harbinger Publications. https://mshoop.org/wp-lib/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The-Anxiety-Skills-Workbook.pdf

Joyce, M. a. L. (2024). Causes and Consequences of Introvert Personality: A study in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*. *Shanlax International Journal of English*, *12*(S1-Feb), 126–129. https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v12is1-feb.7461

Jung, C. G. (1970). Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. In G. Adler & R. F. C. Hull (Eds. & Trans.), The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 9, Part 1 (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press. https://www.jungiananalysts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/C.-G.-Jung-Collected-Works-Volume-9i_-The-Archetypes-of-the-Collective-Unconscious.pdf

Krippendorff, K. (2018). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://books.google.com/books/about/Content_Analysis.html?hl=id&id=nE1aDwAAQBAJ

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati

Nishanthi, S., & Rajathi, D. J. B. E. (2024). The Primary Character In Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*: A Psychoanalytic Study. International Journal of Novel Research and Development, 9(4), a73-a74. https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2404010.pdf

Rowell, R. (2013). *Fangirl*. St. Martin's Griffin. https://books.google.com/books/about/*Fangirl*.html?hl=id&id=BfseA9a8xVMC

Rozen, N., & Aderka, I. M. (2023). Emotions in social anxiety disorder: A review. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, *95*, 102696. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2023.102696

Rumatiga, M., & Pramesti, T. (2023). Cath's Anxiety in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*. *Austronesian Journal of Language Science & Literature*, *2*(3), 126–142. https://doi.org/10.59011/austronesian.2.3.2023.126-142

Seda, K. H., & Supsiadji, M. R. (2023). Kiko's anxiety in Akemi Dawn Bowman's Starfish. *Cultural Narratives.*, *1*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.59066/cn.v1i1.442

Thompson, M. J. (Ed.). (2017). The Palgrave handbook of critical theory. Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/978-1-137-55801-5

Vinothini, S. (2025). Silence to Self-Identity: Psychological Traits of Cath Avery Hinders Identity Development in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*. *Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities Arts and Science*, *10*(S2-Nov), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.64938/bijsi.v10si2.25.nov050

Walsh, B., & Horowitz, S. (2016). Introduction to text analysis: A coursebook. GitBook. https://briananderson.gitbooks.org/introduction-to-text-analysis/

Wulan, P. A., & Sahri, Z. (2024). ANXIETY DISORDER IN SOPHIE KINSELLA'S FINDING AUDREY. *JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE*, *6*(1), 100–111. https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v6i1.8983

Copyright © 2026, Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, Sudarwati Sudarwati