

# Familial Disharmony and Its Implications for Main Characters in *Fangirl*

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**Abstract.** Family is one of the most important social institutions and primary groups in society. It is a social group consisting of members related to one another by blood and marital ties. There are several functions of family, such as economic, educational, religious, prestige, protecting, recreational, and affecting function. If the functions above fail to be fulfilled in the family, this condition is called a family dysfunction. Family dysfunction is any condition that interferes with healthy family functioning. This article is about family dysfunction in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* as the data source. This research applies the qualitative research design meanwhile the approach used is sociological. Two problems that will be discussed in this research are the causes and the effects of family dysfunction experienced by the Avery family in the novel. The family is characterized by a range of dysfunctional dynamics that impact each member of the family. The family consists of the father, Athur, the mother, Laura, and the twin daughters, Cath and Wren. Athur suffers from mental illness and Laura leaves the family. Both facts are examples of the causes of family dysfunction, while the examples of its effects are that Cath and Wren suffer from anxiety and depression. Family dysfunction is a general problem that may happen to other families. Analyzing literary depictions of family dysfunction also highlights the need for social support systems and policy interventions to address common sources of family problems. The complex character portrayals in *Fangirl* provide a vivid and nuanced representation of dysfunctional family dynamics, underscoring the importance of functional families for individual and societal well-being.

**Keywords:** causes, effects, family dysfunction

## INTRODUCTION

A family is a group of persons united by ties of blood, marriage, or adoption. There are two types of families in society. They are the extended family and the nuclear family. The extended family is general in common civilizations, where all

family members are related and share family tasks, including parenting obligations. (Waites, 2009). Meanwhile according to Dale et.al. (2016) The nuclear family is a biological part of primate human society. It is led by a husband-wife couple as well as parents and children. Family functioning which includes role allocation, communication, emotional reaction, problem-solving skills, and behavior management among family members, is an essential component in evaluating the quality of the home environment (Zhang & Wang, 2020)

According to Openshaw (2011), family functioning in principle refers to the quality of interaction between family members, namely the way they socialize positively among family members. Stewart & Ware (1992) has a more complex opinion regarding family functioning, which appears as a concept regarding family characteristics, ability to adapt, communication, self-acceptance, social support, affection, time spent together, ability to express emotions, problem-solving, morality or religiosity, family climate, hatred and concern between each family member. Meanwhile, family functioning in families where parents have problems or family members have problems will experience changes due to changes in the family structure to become a dysfunctional family. Family dysfunction occurs when family members fail to carry out their duties and functions in accordance with a system, the family can be separated if one or more family members fail to carry out their obligations and functions in the family, resulting in dysfunctional family.

The family dysfunction can be viewed as society's smallest social system. That experience has revealed that family dysfunction is commonly handed down to the following generation and reenacted (Morrison, 1977). Family dysfunction is primarily a result of two adults, one typically overtly abusive and the other codependent, and may also be affected by substance abuse or other forms of addiction, or sometimes by an untreated mental illness (Masteller & Stoop, 2011). A dysfunctional family is a family which improper and immature behavior of at least one parents damage the growth of individuality and development of healthy relational skills among family members June (2014).

Dysfunction family in *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell is interesting to study. The novel tells the story of a dysfunctional family life. This novel is chosen as the object of study because the researcher is interested in the depiction of dysfunctional family in this novel. The condition of dysfunctional family in the novel is a condition that cannot be ignored. The family is the center for fostering an individual before finally joining and mingling with society at large, so family problems, especially family dysfunction, are very important for the community to realize as also the need for courage to raise the dysfunction that occurs in the family to the public or competent parties in dealing with problems of dysfunctional family.

The article deals with the causes and effects of family dysfunction in the family in the novel. In the research process, the perspective of the sociology of literature and Family System Theory by Murray Bowen are applied. According to Bowen's Family System Theory, family dysfunction is defined as patterns of maladaptive behavior, emotional reaction, and unresolved issues within a family system that interfere with healthy functioning and growth (Hunt, 2014). Bowen states that family dysfunction is brought on by the interaction of several elements, including emotional fusion, poor self-differentiation, and multigenerational transfer of unresolved difficulties. (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

The study of family dysfunction in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* is a significant topic that explores the effects of dysfunctional family dynamics on individuals. Previous research has examined the relationship between multidimensional family functioning and personal growth initiative (Matejević et al., 2014). However, there is a gap in the research regarding the specific causes and effects of family dysfunction in *Fangirl*. Previous research on family dysfunction in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* has primarily focused on multidimensional family functioning and its impact on personal growth initiative. This research gap indicates a need for further exploration of the specific factors that contribute to family dysfunction in *Fangirl*, as well as the consequences it has on the characters' mental and emotional well-being, relationships, and overall narrative development.

Furthermore, there are not too many studies that discuss family dysfunction in novels, research from Leclercq (2019) which explains that *The Lost Child* discuss family dysfunction are very close to the postcolonial spirit, where there is a desire for unheard voices in a colonial era to still be heard today. Leclercq (2019) also concludes that the inability of family members to speak up is a result of colonial and paternalist factors that lead to psychological disorders. Research from Messaoudi and Al-Khawaldeh (2022) only focuses on the dysfunction of the father's role in in Hanif Kureishi's Novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The findings in this study explain that patriarchal culture is still a challenge in a family, the role of the father is very important in building or destroying a family. Because, the father is a symbol of family unity and strength. The two studies did not use the same novel, so from the lack of previous research, it can be concluded that this study can make an important contribution in discussing the role of family in fiction.

The Avery family in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* is characterized by a series of dysfunctional dynamics that affect every member of the family. The father, Athur, is left by his wife, Laura, and he must raise his two daughters, Cath and Wren, which proves to be a great challenge. His mental health issues make it difficult for him to provide a stable home environment, and the absence of the mother has left a void in the family that the father has been unable to fill. The twins are left to navigate their childhood largely on their own, which has impacted their

relationships with one another. The causes and the effects of family dysfunction are the focus of the article.

## METHOD

Sociological approach is used in this research because family dysfunction refers to patterns of maladaptive behaviors, emotional reactivity, and unresolved conflicts within a family system that hinder healthy functioning and growth. Thus, sociological approach is used to explore how social inequalities like the father's mental illness and class differences impact the family. Meanwhile, the family theory is used to analyze how the dysfunctional behavior in the Avery family disrupts the essential functions of a family like socialization, emotional support, and economic stability, for example, analyze situations where socialization fails, emotional support is lacking, or economic hardship burdens the family.

The method used is descriptive qualitative method because the data to be examined are part of words, sentences, and also paragraphs, so that the data will be presented in the form of a description. The limitation of this research is that it focuses on only one novel as a data source, so there needs to be research that uses several novels that discuss family dysfunction to get the findings.

Data collection procedure is the procedure for collecting various information about the topic of analysis. The step of collecting data are gathering information related to dysfunctional family from the novel and other sources, determining the characters in the novel to be analyzed, identifying data based on the problem statement, and organizing the data into section according to their classification. To begin with, the collected data, which in this study consist of textual excerpts from the novel, are transcribed and organized for analysis. The steps of analyzing the data are done by interpreting the data and relating them to the problem statement, analyzing the data and relating them to the theory used, organizing the analysis, and concluding the result of the analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Avery family in the novel *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell consisting of a father, Athur, a mother, Laura, and the twin girls Cath and Wren are described as having a family disfunction. There are causes which make the Avery family lose its normal function. The family dysfunction happening to the family give effects on its members. The causes and the effects are elaborated below.

### **A. Causes of Dysfunctional Family in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*.**

In this section the causes of family dysfunction in novel and how they contribute to the struggles faced by the Avery family, through an analysis of the characters and their experiences will be explored. The causes of dysfunction in the Avery family are historical trauma, mental illness, substance addiction, divorce, lack of understanding, and personality disorders.

### **A.1. Historical Trauma and Family History**

Historical trauma is a term used to describe the intergenerational and cumulative emotional and psychological harm that results from a catastrophic event or a long-standing history of traumatic experiences. Historical trauma can affect entire communities, cultures, or ethnic groups, and can have lasting impacts on individuals' well-being, mental health, and relationships. The effects of historical trauma can manifest in various ways, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, self-harm, and other forms of mental and physical health problems.

The protagonist of this novel, Cath, and her twin sister, Wren, have grown up with a mother who left their family when they are young. Cath's use of the term "actual drama" suggests that she feels that her mother's departure is a significant and traumatic event that has had a lasting impact on the family. She describes her mother's departure as the "most dramatic way possible" and implies that it was a traumatic and devastating event. The below quotation proves the condition above:

“No.” Cath slashed the air with her spatula. “This isn’t melodrama. This is actual drama. She left us. In the most dramatic way possible. On September eleventh.”

“After September eleventh—”

“Details. She left us. She broke Dad’s heart and maybe his brain, and she left us.” (Rowell, 2013:176)

### **B.2. Mental Illness and Emotional Instability**

Mental illness refers to a wide range of mental health conditions that affect an individual's mood, thinking, and behavior. Emotional instability refers to the emotional and psychological state of an individual that is characterized by unpredictability, mood swings, and irrational behavior. Mental instability can be a symptom of various mental health disorders, including anxiety disorders, personality disorders, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, among others. It can cause significant challenges in personal and social relationships and interfere with an individual's ability to function normally in daily life. Cath's father suffers from bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety, which makes it difficult for him to connect with his daughters and provide emotional support. This, in turn, affects Cath and Wren's emotional well-being and their ability to form healthy relationships. This can be seen in the following quotation:

“She wondered if this guy had been here when they’d brought her dad in. Did they have to restrain him? Was he screaming? Was he spitting? She wanted everyone here, starting with this guy, to know that her dad was a person, not just a crazy person.” (Rowell, 2013:167)

### **A.3. Substance Abuse and Addiction**

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, such as drugs or alcohol, which can lead to physical and psychological dependence, as well as negative consequences on an individual's health, social life, and ability to function effectively. Addiction is a state characterized by compulsive drug-seeking behavior and the inability to control drug use despite negative consequences. It is considered a chronic brain disorder that affects a person's motivation, reward, and memory functions. Substance abuse and addiction can have serious impacts on an individual's life, relationships, and overall well-being.

The stress and chaos caused by addiction can also lead to increased levels of conflict and tension within the family. This can lead to a breakdown in relationships and cause family members to feel unsupported and alone in dealing with the addiction. Ultimately, substance abuse and addiction can cause significant harm to a family's emotional well-being, relationships, and stability, leading to dysfunction, such as when Wren's addiction to alcohol cause her to almost lose her life. This can be seen in the following quotation. We don't need to talk about this," Wren said, "You were just hospitalized for alcohol poisoning," their dad said. "We're talking about it." (Rowell,2013:262)

### **B.4. Divorce and Family Separation**

Divorce left the family to become dysfunctional because they disrupt the family structure, role, and dynamics. The separation of parents can be traumatic for children, especially if it involves a contentious divorce, custody battles, or conflicts over financial support. Children may feel torn between their parents or may be forced to choose sides, leading to feelings of guilt and anxiety. Divorce and separation can also lead to financial difficulties, which can add to the stress and tension within the family. "Wren and Cath worried their parents were going to get divorced and split them up, just like in *The Parent Trap*. "I'll go with Dad," Wren would say. "He needs more help." (Rowell,2013:181).

The divorce of Cath's parents and her mother's subsequent abandonment has caused a rift in the family and in fact became the main catalyst of their entire family to become dysfunctional, Cath and Wren struggle to cope with the emotional fallout. This separation has also led to a lack of communication and understanding between the family members.

### **B.5. Lack of Empathy and Understanding**

Lack of empathy refers to the inability or difficulty to understand and share the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others. It is the absence or deficiency of the ability to feel and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. People who lack empathy may have difficulty connecting with others emotionally, recognizing and responding to their needs, and showing compassion or concern for

their well-being. This can lead to difficulties in personal and professional relationships and can contribute to a range of interpersonal problems.

“He sighed. “I wondered if that’s what this was about.” He put his glasses back on. “Cath, you’re not moving back home to take care of me.” ‘That’s not the main reason—but it wouldn’t be a bad thing. You do better when you’re not alone.” (Rowell,2013:183)

This conversation between Cath and Arthur shows a good example how insensitive Cath is towards her father, while it’s true that Arthur’s disorder most of the time renders him crippled and constantly needs monitoring and help. It is insensitive when being put this way, since this showing of role reversal would cause Arthur to feel useless as a father and further increase the dysfunction within the family. This creates a never-ending cycle of unhappiness and regrets.

#### **A.6. Personality Disorders and Dysfunctional Patterns**

A personality disorder is a mental health condition that affects a person's way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, which can cause significant problems in their daily life and relationships with others. Personality disorders are typically characterized by rigid and unhealthy patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that deviate from societal norms and expectations. These patterns are often deeply ingrained and difficult to change, and may cause significant distress and impairment in personal, social, and professional domains.

Dysfunctional patterns refer to repetitive behaviors, habits, or ways of thinking that are harmful or ineffective in achieving positive outcomes. In the context of a family, dysfunctional patterns are patterns of behavior or communication that prevent the family from functioning in a healthy and productive manner. Dysfunctional patterns can be passed down through generations and can be difficult to break without outside intervention and support.

In the case of Avery Family, this general cause of family dysfunction is shown by Laura and Cath. As seen in this quotation “their mom was so self-centered, she couldn’t be trusted not to desecrate a national tragedy with her own issues.” (Rowell,2013:106)

#### **B. Effects of Dysfunctional Family on the Avery Family in Rainbow Rowell’s *Fangirl*.**

The impact of a dysfunctional family can be profound and long-lasting, affecting various aspects of a person's life such as their emotional and mental well-being, relationships, and overall functioning. The dysfunction within the Avery family has a profound effect on their individual and collective well-being. This impact is explored throughout the novel, revealing the damaging consequences of a family system that fails to provide the love, support, and stability that its members need to thrive. The impact of dysfunctional family in this research can be

categorized into trust issue, low academic performance, dishonesty, poor communicational skill, anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, shame and guilt, and alcoholism.

### **B.1. Trust Issue**

Trust issue is a common problem that arises in families where dysfunctionality exists. It is a feeling of doubt or uncertainty that one experiences towards another person or people, arising from a perceived lack of honesty, integrity, or reliability. In families affected by dysfunction, trust issues often develop due to the presence of dishonesty, betrayal, and lack of consistency in actions or words.

Trust issues can develop when a child grows up in a dysfunctional family where they experience consistent disappointment, broken promises, or outright betrayal from their family members. When a child cannot trust their own family members, it can be challenging for them to trust others in their life, leading to trust issues. This can be seen in the following quotation:

“She hadn’t forgiven him yet, and even though she was probably going to, she still didn’t trust him. She didn’t trust anyone, and that was a problem. That was a fundamental problem.” (Rowell,2013:202)

There is also a quotation that supports the problem:

“I don’t think I’m any good at this. Boy–girl. Person–person. I don’t trust anybody. Not anybody. And the more that I care about someone, the surer I am they’re going to get tired of me and take off.” (Rowell,2013:209)

The quotation above, suggests that Cath is holding onto past hurts or resentments. She also admits that even though she's probably going to forgive this person, she still does not trust them. This indicates that Cath's trust issues are not only about forgiving someone but also about letting someone back into her life and feeling safe with them again. “I don’t trust anybody. Not anybody. And the more that I care about someone, the surer I am they’re going to get tired of me and take off.” (Rowell,2013:209).

Cath's statement in the above quotation shows that she does not trust anyone suggests that her trust issues go beyond this one particular situation. It is likely that she has experienced past betrayals or disappointments that have made it difficult for her to trust others. This lack of trust can be a fundamental problem because it can affect her relationships with others and her ability to form close connections. If Cath is constantly on guard and does not allow herself to be vulnerable, she may struggle forming meaningful connections with others.

### **B.2. Low Academic Performance and Career Goals**

Low academic performance and lack of career goals are common among individuals who come from dysfunctional families. The instability and chaos at



home can make it difficult for children to focus on their education and future aspirations. In some cases, they may not receive the necessary support and encouragement from their family members to pursue academic and career goals. As a result, these individuals may struggle academically and have difficulty finding direction in their professional lives.

“Well, I didn’t turn in my final project. I was supposed to write a shortstory, and I didn’t.”

“What?” His chin tucked back in surprise. “Why?”

“I ... lots of reasons.” This was more complicated than Cath thought.(Rowell,2013:232)

They may also experience feelings of hopelessness and low self-worth, which can further impede their academic and career success. In seventh grade, she'd been late to class for the first two weeks because she couldn't stand being in the halls with everyone else during passing periods.” (Rowell,2013:171).

The quotation shows that Cath is unable to handle being in the halls with everyone else during passing periods in seventh grade. This suggests that Cath may struggle with social anxiety or feeling overwhelmed in crowded or noisy environments. These feelings can make it difficult for her to concentrate and focus on her studies, which could impact her grades. “I just don’t think you understand,” Cath said. It came out a sob. She looked down at her lap, ashamed, and saw the red F again.” (Rowell,2013:77).

In this quotation, we see that Cath is upset about receiving a failing grade, which could indicate that she is putting a lot of pressure on herself to succeed academically even though it’s happened because of misunderstanding, an sign of bad communication skill, this still falls into the category of how dysfunctional family can affect academic performance.

### **B.3. Dishonesty**

Dishonesty is a common and destructive impact of growing up in a dysfunctional family. Children in dysfunctional families often learn to lie and hide the truth to avoid conflicts or protect themselves from abusive behavior. They may have to lie to cover up for a parent's substance abuse or hide bruises from physical abuse. Dishonesty in children from dysfunctional families often stems from a lack of trust and communication within the family. Children may feel the need to lie or hide the truth to avoid conflict or protect themselves from punishment, as they do not feel safe or comfortable being open and honest with their family members. In some cases, parents or caregivers in dysfunctional families may also model dishonesty or manipulative behavior, which children may learn and adopt as a means of survival.

“Have you started?” Professor Piper asked. “Yes,” Cath lied. She couldn’t help it. She couldn’t say no—Professor Piper was liable to abort this whole endeavor. Cath still hadn’t shown her any

progress ... Because Cath hadn't made any progress."  
(Rowell,2013:291)

The quotation above shows Cath's struggle with dishonesty as a way to cope with the emotional turmoil and confusion of the situation. Children from a dysfunctional family may feel torn between their parents and not want to upset either one, leading them to lie or withhold information to avoid conflicts.

#### **B.4. Poor Communication Skill**

Poor communication skills are a common impact of growing up in a dysfunctional family, and this is often caused by the bad communication within family members. Children may not learn how to express their needs and emotions effectively or how to listen and empathize with others. They may also learn to avoid communication altogether to avoid conflicts or negative reactions from their family members.

As a result of growing up in a dysfunctional family with poor communication skills, individuals may struggle to express their thoughts and feelings effectively. They may have difficulty in sharing their emotions, thoughts, and needs with others, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. Poor communication skills can also hinder individuals from building healthy relationships and maintaining social connections. They may struggle with building trust and may have difficulty establishing boundaries or expressing their needs to others. In the case of the Avery family, poor communication skills are evident in Cath's daily life.

"You still haven't talked to her?" Wren asked at lunch the next week. "We talk," Cath said. "She says, 'Would you mind closing the window?' And I say, 'That's fine.' Also, 'Hey.' We exchange 'heys' daily. Sometimes twice daily. "It's getting weird," Wren said. (Rowell,2013:20-21)

The conversation suggests that Cath may struggle with communication skills. When Wren asks Cath if she has talked to her roommate, Cath responds by saying that they talk but only exchange simple phrases like "Hey" and "Would you mind closing the window?" This limited and surface-level communication could indicate that Cath is uncomfortable or inexperienced with more in-depth conversations.

#### **B.5. Anxiety, Depression, and Bad Mental health.**

Dysfunctional families can have a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of family members. This is particularly evident in the Avery family, where the emotionally detached atmosphere contributed to Arthur's bipolar disorder, things got worse when the factors that contribute to his condition go undiagnosed for an extended period.

This highlights the importance of emotional connection and support in healthy family relationships. His ongoing mental illness also adding more problems the

family's dysfunction, causing emotional distress and instability for Cath and Wren.

“I am. I’m crazy like him.” She was already having panic attacks. She was already hiding at parties. In seventh grade, she’d been late to class for the first two weeks because she couldn’t stand being in the halls with everyone else during passing periods.” (Rowell, 2013:171).

The quotation above shows how Cath gets anxious in various situation and how anxiety severely affects her in negative light throughout her life, the Avery family's experience underscores the importance of seeking help and support in dysfunctional family situations. By seeking treatment and openly discussing their emotions and experiences, family members can work towards healing and improving their mental health and well-being. The lack of action taken in the Avery family ultimately led to long-term consequences and emotional distress, emphasizing the need for early intervention and support in dysfunctional families.

“But the hallway was practically a meet-and-greet. Every door was propped open but theirs. Girls were milling around, talking, and laughing. The whole floor smelled like burnt microwave popcorn. Cath slipped into the bathroom and sat in one of the stalls, unwrapping her protein bar and letting nervous tears dribble down her cheeks. God, she thought. God. Okay. This isn’t that bad. There’s actually nothing wrong, actually. What’s wrong, Cath? Nothing. She felt tight everywhere. Snapping. And her stomach was on fire.” (Rowell,2013:18)

The quotation shows signs of anxiety and stress in Cath, which can be linked to bad mental health. Cath is feeling overwhelmed by the social interaction and noise on her dorm floor, and she seeks refuge in the bathroom to collect herself. She tries to calm herself down by telling herself that there is nothing wrong, but she is still experiencing physical symptoms of anxiety. The description of the hallway being filled with socializing girls and a strong popcorn smell creates a sensory overload that can feel suffocating to someone with anxiety. Besides, the depiction of isolation and withdrawal shows Cath seeks refuge in the bathroom stall, highlighting her tendency to isolate herself when overwhelmed. Phrases like "God, she thought. God. Okay" and "What's wrong, Cath? Nothing" reveal an internal struggle, questioning her own feelings and trying to downplay them. The descriptions of feeling "tight everywhere," "snapping," and a "stomach on fire" depict the physical symptoms of anxiety, like tension, racing thoughts, and digestive distress. The quote paints a clear picture of Cath experiencing a panic

attack or intense anxiety episode. While not a diagnosis, it showcases the significant mental health challenges she faces throughout the novel.

### **B.6. Low Self Esteem, Feelings of Being Unimportant and Unworthy**

Growing up in a dysfunctional family can lead to feelings of being unimportant and unworthy. Children in dysfunctional families may not receive the emotional validation and support they need, causing them to feel ignored, invisible, and insignificant, they may also be subjected to constant criticism, blame, or neglect, which can damage their self-esteem and self-worth.

As a result, these feelings of unworthiness and unimportance can impact their future relationships and their ability to set healthy boundaries. They may struggle to assert themselves or speak up for themselves, leading to difficulties in personal and professional relationships. They may develop a sense of self-doubt, constantly questioning their abilities and worthiness, which can hold them back from pursuing their dreams and goals. This can be seen in the quotation below.

““It’s college,” Wren said, exasperated, covering her face with her hands. “It’s supposed to be an adventure.”

“It’s already an adventure.” Cath crawled up next to her sister and pulled Wren’s hands away from her face. “The whole prospect is already terrifying.”

“We’re supposed to meet new people,” Wren repeated. “I don’t need new people.” (Rowell, 2013:2)

The conversation between Cath and Wren above suggests that Cath may have feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in herself. When Wren talks about college being an adventure and an opportunity to meet new people, Cath responds by saying that the whole prospect is already terrifying. This statement suggests that Cath may feel overwhelmed and anxious about the idea of putting herself out there and meeting new people. Wren's response, in which she expresses a desire to meet new people, highlights a contrast between Cath and her sister.

“As soon as the door closed, Levi popped his eyes again. Bluely. “That’s your twin sister?” “Identical,” Reagan said, like she had a mouth full of hair. Cath nodded and sat down at her desk.

“Wow.” Levi scooted down the bed so he was sitting across from her. “I’m not sure what you’re getting at,” Cath said, “but I think it’s offensive.” “How can the fact that your identical twin sister is super-hot be offensive to you?”

“Because,” Cath said, still too encouraged by Wren and, weirdly, by Abel, and maybe even by Nick to let this get to her right now. “It makes me feel like the Ugly One.”” (Rowell, 2013:57)

The above conversation between Cath, Reagan, and Levi highlights Cath's low self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness. When Levi comments on how attractive Cath's twin sister is, Cath immediately feels offended and hurt. She interprets Levi's comment as implying that she is not as attractive as her sister, which reinforces her insecurities and makes her feel like the "Ugly One" which doesn't really make sense since Wren is her identical twin. Cath's reaction to Levi's comment suggests that she is deeply insecure about her appearance and her worth as a person. Cath seems to subscribe to external beauty standards (hotness) and feels inferior to Wren when measured against these. The comment suggests that Cath's sense of worth is heavily dependent on her physical appearance and attractiveness. Labeling herself unprovoked showcases low self-confidence and a tendency to downplay her own qualities.

The comparison with Wren might be fueled by existing sibling rivalry or competition for attention and validation. Fear of judgment and social awkwardness might also contribute to Cath's discomfort with comparisons and vulnerability in social situations. Although fleeting, Cath's initial confidence boost from Wren and Abel suggests a potential for growth and challenging her negative self-perceptions. This situation is just one instance of Cath grappling with her self-esteem, and analyzing similar instances throughout the novel can reveal the complexities and evolution of her internal struggles.

### **B.7. Shame and Guilt**

Shame and guilt are common effects of growing up in a dysfunctional family, and these feelings can have a domino effect on both parents and children. Parents who struggle with addiction or mental health issues may feel shame and guilt for not being able to provide a stable environment for their children, while children may feel ashamed for their family situation or guilty for not being able to fix it. These feelings can lead to a cycle of shame and guilt, where children blame themselves for their parents' problems and feel unworthy of love and acceptance. They may also struggle with low self-esteem and fear of failure, which can impact their relationships and future goals.

“Okay,” Cath said, then forced herself to keep going. “Thank you ... This isn't going to be a regular thing, you know. I promise not to call you the next time one of my relatives gets drunk or goes crazy.” (Rowell, 2013:165)

The quotation above shows Cath's statement about not making a habit of calling the person suggests that she may feel embarrassed or ashamed about

having to seek help for her family members, or that she does not want to burden the person with her family's problems. There could be various reasons why Cath might feel ashamed of her family's conditions, such as societal or cultural expectations that place a stigma on mental illness or alcoholism, or a personal sense of responsibility or guilt for her family members' issues.

### **B.8. Alcoholism**

Abuse of drugs and alcohol is a common effect of growing up in a dysfunctional family. Children who are exposed to domestic violence, neglect, or parental substance abuse may use substances as a way to temporarily relieve emotional pain and numb their feelings. Parents who grew up in dysfunctional families themselves may turn to substance abuse as a way to cope with their own unresolved trauma and emotional pain. This can create a repeating generational pattern, where the cycle of addiction and dysfunctional behavior is passed down from one generation to the next. Dysfunctional families can perpetuate false beliefs about the use of drugs and alcohol.

“I’m awake, you know,” Wren whispered. “Are you still drunk?” “A little. Muzzy.”

Cath tucked Wren’s hair back again in a soothing gesture. Soothing for Cath, anyway. “What happened?”

“Don’t remember.” (Rowell, 2013:255)

The conversation above shows that Wren's environment may have contributed to her alcoholism. She and her twin sister Cath are going through a significant transition as they begin college, and Wren may have turned to alcohol as a way to cope with the stress and anxiety that comes with such a major life change.

She didn’t know what Wren had been drinking. She didn’t know where she’d been or whom she was with.

All the other questions felt like things Cath shouldn’t answer in front of a stranger—in front of Laura, who was just standing there, watching Cath’s face like she was taking notes. Cath looked at her, helplessly, defensively, and Laura walked back to the corner. Was Wren a regular drinker? Yes.

Did she often drink to drunkenness? Yes. Did she black out? Yes. Did she use any other drugs? I don’t know. Was she on any medication? Birth control. Do you have an insurance card? Yes.” (Rowell, 2013:249)

Wren also may have been influenced by her peers and social norms around alcohol consumption in college. It gets to the point that her alcohol addiction becomes life-endangering when she is passed out due to alcohol poisoning. Cath's

response of "Yes" to "Did she often drink to drunkenness?" directly indicates Wren's habitual excessive alcohol consumption. Cath acknowledging Wren's blackouts highlights the severity of her drinking problem, as blackouts suggest significant alcohol poisoning. The context of university life, a setting often associated with high rates of alcohol consumption, suggests that peer pressure and social norms around drinking might be influencing Wren's behavior. Cath's emotional state - "helplessly, defensively" responding to Laura's questions - reveals her internal struggle between concern for Wren and an underlying defensiveness possibly stemming from their complex sibling relationship. Although not directly stated, Cath's detailed responses and Laura's presence suggest a potential shift in Cath's role, taking on more responsibility for Wren's well-being despite the emotional challenges it presents.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*, several conclusions can be drawn as follows. The dysfunctional family are portrayed by the Avery family, where various signs of dysfunction are evident, impacting the family members in different ways such as emotional abuse, neglect, blaming, hostility, conflict, role reversal, secrecy, lies, bad communication, and substance abuse.

The causes of dysfunctional family in the Avery family are historical trauma, mental illness, alcohol addiction, divorce, lack of understanding, and personality disorders. The impact of dysfunctional family in the Avery family can be categorized into trust issue, low academic performance, dishonesty, poor communicational skill, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, shame, guilt, and alcoholism.

Arthur's mental illness, bipolar disorder, further compounds dysfunctional family. Laura leaving the family, leaving the two little girls without a mother figure, has a profound emotional and physical impact on the family. The family's trauma is also strongly affected by Arthur's mental illness, which leaves him unable to properly care for the girls. The result is a family that is deeply dysfunctional, with a lasting impact on the children, particularly Cath and Wren.

Cath is the character most impacted by the family's detachment. Her grades suffer, and her communication skills are lacking, leading to misunderstandings with her professors and peers. Cath's self-esteem is also low, and she struggles with anxiety, leading her to act dishonestly to hide her insecurities. Additionally, Wren turns to alcohol to cope with her trauma, further compounding the negative impact of the family's detachment.

In short, even under the shadow of a dysfunctional family, Cath and Wren demonstrate personal growth and agency in navigating their struggles. Cath's journey towards acknowledging and managing her anxiety, and Wren's potential for seeking help with her addiction, highlight the possibility of overcoming

hardship and forging individual paths towards healing. Despite the challenges posed by family dysfunction, *Fangirl* showcases the enduring importance of family bonds and support systems. While both Cath and Wren grapple with the consequences of their dysfunctional family, their connection and attempts to care for each other offer a glimmer of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

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