



Dysfunctional family in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*

Dianisa Cintami Ananditha

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: diann.nisaa@gmail.com

Anik Cahyaning Rahayu

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: anikcahyaning@untag-sby.ac.id

Abstract. This study is about Dysfunctional Family in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*. This study applies the qualitative research design meanwhile the approach used is sociological approach. Two problems will be discussed in this study, namely signs of dysfunctional family and types of dysfunctional family. The data source is *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell. The novel is about Avery family who is characterized by a range of dysfunctional dynamics that impact each member of the family. From the analysis above, it can be concluded that analysis of this study consist two, which are the sign of dysfunctional family in Avery family portrayed by emotional abuse, neglect, blaming, hostility, conflict, bad communication, and role reversal. The types of dysfunctional family in the Avery family can be characterized as having a chaotic family type, pathological family type, chronic conflict family type.

Keyword: *Dysfunctional family, sign, types*

1. INTRODUCTION

In any civilization, family is the smallest unit of a system of society. Individual families are necessary for a civilization to exist. According to (B.T., 2021) As human society creates, both individuals and their intelligence with one another, particularly those who are the first to infer and hint at family linkages within relationships, progress and become intriguingly complicated. The human social environment includes the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural contexts within which distinct groups of people operate and engage with one another (Nurwakhidah & Supsiadji, 2020). There are two types of families in society, which 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, A. L., & 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 has problems will experience changes due to changes in the family structure to become a dysfunctional family. Dysfunctional family 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 dysfunctional family can be viewed as society's smallest social system. That experience has revealed that familial dysfunction is commonly handed down to the following generation and reenacted (Morrison, 1977)

Dysfunctional 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 *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell 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 research will focus on searching the form of dysfunctional family in the family to find the sociological meaning of family dysfunction in the novel. In the research process, the perspective of the sociology of literature and use Family Systems Theory by Murray Bowen. According to Bowen's Family Systems 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. Bowen contends 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 Avery family in Rainbow Rowell *Fangirl* is characterized by a series of dysfunctional dynamics that affect every member of the family. The father is left to raise them on his own, 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 childhoods largely on their own, which has impacted their relationships with one another. The Avery family in *Fangirl* exhibits characteristics of several types of dysfunctional families. Relating to the dysfunctional family happening to the Avery family in the novel, this research will elaborate the signs and the types of dysfunctional family.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Bowen's Family System Theory

Bowen's theory, also known as Bowen Family Systems Theory, is a sociology theory developed by Murray Bowen in the 1950s. It provides a framework for understanding the dynamics and functioning of families, particularly in relation to family dysfunction. According to Bowen a theory of human behavior that defines the family unit as a complex social system in which members interact to influence each other's behavior. Family members interconnect, making it appropriate to view the system as a whole rather than as individual elements (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen's theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of family members and the impact of family systems on individual

behaviors and functioning. According to Bowen, family dysfunction is primarily rooted in circular emotional patterns and unresolved conflicts that are passed down through generations. For this reason, it may be easier to understand individual family members when they are viewed within the context of their family ties and human relationships.

2.2 Dysfunctional Family

A dysfunctional family is a family in which conflict, misbehavior, and often child neglect or abuse and sometimes even all of the above on the part of individual parents occur continuously and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions. Children sometimes grow up in such families with the understanding that such a situation is normal. Dysfunctional families are 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 member (June Hunt, 2014)

2.3 Sign of Dysfunctional Family

First is sign of dysfunctional family, dysfunctional families often exhibit observable signs and patterns of behavior that indicate underlying issues. Research in the field has identified several common signs of dysfunctional families. For instance, (Grych & Fincham, 2001) have shown that poor communication, frequent conflicts, and high levels of hostility are indicative of dysfunction within the family. Other signs may include rigid family roles, lack of emotional support, neglect, or abuse (Cox et al., 2012). These signs can be categorized into different types of dysfunction, such as communication breakdown, emotional neglect, blaming (Walsh, 2016). The common signs of dysfunctional family are role reversal and bad communication.

2.4 Type of Dysfunctional Family

One of the central concepts in Bowen's theory is differentiation of self, which refers to an individual's ability to separate their thoughts, emotions, and actions from those of their family members. Higher levels of differentiation are associated with healthier family functioning, while lower levels are associated with increased emotional fusion and dysfunction. Bowen's theory of family systems provides a valuable framework for understanding and categorizing different types of family dysfunction. According to (Bowen, 1978), unresolved emotional issues and patterns of interaction within the family can contribute to various forms of dysfunction. One type is the pathological family, characterized by deeply ingrained emotional problems and destructive patterns of behavior that are passed down through generations (Papero, 2014). The chronic conflict family is marked by ongoing tension and hostility, with frequent arguments and unresolved disputes (Bowen, 1978). In the chaotic family, there is a lack of structure, consistency, and clear boundaries, resulting in disorganization and unpredictability (Papero, 2014). These different types of family dysfunction can have significant implications for the overall functioning and well-being of family members.

3. METHOD

The research uses sociological approach because dysfunctional family from Murray Bowen, family dysfunction refers to patterns of maladaptive behaviors, emotional

reactivity, and unresolved conflicts within a family system that hinder healthy functioning and growth. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method, because, in this research, the data to be examined is part of words, sentences, and also paragraphs, so that the data will be presented in the form of a description.

Data collection procedure is the procedure for collecting various information about the topic of analysis at *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell. The step of collecting data are as reading *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell several times, looking for information and articles that are related to *Fangirl* by RaThe inbow Rowell and about dysfunctional family from 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 consists of textual excerpts from the novel, are transcribed and organized for analysis. The steps analyses the data are done as follows 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.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Signs of Dysfunctional Family in Avery Family in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*

Sign of a dysfunctional family is any behavior, trait, or characteristic exhibited by the family members that indicate a breakdown in the normal functioning of the family unit. Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*, the dysfunctional family is portrayed through 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, and bad communication.

4.1.1 Abuse, Neglect, and Blaming

One major sign of family dysfunction on the Avery family in *Fangirl* is emotional abuse, blaming, and neglect. This can be seen in the way that Laura, the mother of Cath and Wren, neglects her responsibilities as a parent and is absent bot emotionally and physically for her daughters. Laura abandons her family, leaving her husband to take care of their twin daughters, Cath and Wren, which leads to neglect of the girls. She also blames her husband for her unhappiness, as in this quotation I'm done, Art. I'm just done. I'm living the wrong life. (Rowell, 2013:106)

In Cath's head, Laura was still young. (Rowell, 2013: 181)

This quotation mentions how Cath's perspective towards her mother Laura is that she is still young, which suggests that she is not fully aware of the reasons behind her mother's absence or how it has impacted her own life. This could be seen as a result of emotional neglect, as Laura's absence has left a gap in Cath's life that she has not been able to fill. It also shows that Cath may not have fully processed her feelings about her mother's absence and the impact it has had on her. This causes Cath to feel anxious and insecure about herself and her relationships with others.

4.1.2 Hostility and Conflict

Hostility is a state of being unfriendly, aggressive, or showing negative emotions towards someone or something. It often involves feelings of anger, resentment, or contempt. Conflict, on the other hand, refers to a serious disagreement or argument between two or more people, often involving opposing interests or ideas. Conflicts can arise due to a

variety of factors such as differences in opinions, values, or beliefs. In a dysfunctional family, conflicts may arise due to unresolved issues or past traumas, lack of communication or empathy, and unhealthy patterns of behavior. These conflicts can lead to a toxic family environment characterized by tension, anxiety, and stress.

In the novel, there are several instances of hostility and conflicts within the dysfunctional Avery family, as in this quotation, Sometimes Wren went out. Cath never went with her. Sometimes Wren didn't come home. Cath never waited up. (Rowell, 2013: 182). Laura's absence and Wren's rebellion create a rift between the sisters, leading to hostility and conflicts. Wren's partying and drinking habits often trigger arguments between her and Cath, who tries to keep her sister under control. The emotional abuse and neglect from Laura also create a hostile environment, with Cath feeling unloved and neglected. This causes her to withdraw from her social life, isolated herself, leading to more conflicts and tension.

4.1.3 Bad Communication

The most common sign of a dysfunctional family is poor communication among family members. In such families, communication tends to be limited, superficial, or nonexistent, leading to misunderstandings, conflicts, and a lack of emotional support. This can result in various negative outcomes, such as a lack of trust and intimacy among family members, difficulty in resolving conflicts, and an inability to work together as a cohesive unit. Children who grow up in families with poor communication skills may struggle to form healthy relationships and develop effective communication skills themselves. The fact that Cath has to leave tons of message and specifically ask her dad to call her back suggests that communication between them is not frequent or easy as can be seen in the following quotation:

Dad, stop ignoring my voice mail. Do you listen to your voice mail? Do you know how? Even if you don't, I know you can see my number in your missed calls. Call me back, okay? _

Dad. Call me. Or call Wren. No, call me. I'm worried about you. I don't like worrying about you. (Rowell, 2013: 43)

4.1.4 Role Revesal

Arthur Avery's bipolar disorder has a significant impact on the family dynamics in the Avery household, leading to a role reversal in parenting, a common sign in dysfunctional family. Bipolar disorder can cause significant mood swings, which can make it challenging for individuals to maintain stable relationships and routines. As a result, Arthur's behavior become erratic, and he struggles to fulfill his role as a parent.

He could tell she was trying to look in his eyes, to take his mental temperature, so he took her chin and let her. I'm fine, he said gently. Back on the horse, Cath. (Rowell, 2013:174). Cath and Wren are forced to take on a more significant role in the family due to their father's illness. They have to take care of themselves and their father, which put them in a challenging and emotionally taxing situation. This role reversal in parenting created a sense of confusion and chaos in the family dynamic, and the girls were left feeling like they had to be the responsible adults in the household.

She and Wren had gotten good at watching him. At noticing when a little manic slid into a lot. When charismatic gave way to crazed. When the twinkle in his eyes turned into a burnt-out flash. Cath stayed up until three o'clock that morning, cleaning up his messes.

If she and Wren had been here, they would have seen this coming. They would have stopped it. (Rowell, 2013:169).

The girls have to deal with their father's illness and the resulting impact on their family without the support they need. This makes it difficult for them to understand what happens and how to deal with their father's behavior.

4.2 Types of Dysfunctional Family in Avery Family in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*

In Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*, the Avery family exhibits various types of family dysfunction. These dysfunctions can be observed through the signs, the family dynamic. Throughout the novel, the Avery family can be characterized as having a pathological family type, chaotic family type, and chronic conflict family type.

4.2.1 Pathological Family Type

This is a common occurrence in Pathological families with mental illness or substance abuse problems, which can result in role reversal where the child got to take care of the parent, long-term emotional and psychological damage to the children. Cath's struggles with anxiety and introversion can also be attributed, in part, to her experiences with her father's mental illness. She is hesitant to form close relationships and prefers to stay within her comfort zone to protect herself from the instability of her family life. Arthur's bipolar disorder serves as a significant source of conflict throughout the novel, highlighting the challenges that families with mental illness face.

Their dad had stayed at St. Richard's three times before. The first time was the summer after their mom left.

The second time was in sixth grade. He was standing over the sink, laughing, and telling them that they didn't have to go to school anymore. Life was an education, he said. He'd cut himself shaving, and there were tiny pieces of toilet paper stuck with blood to his chin.

The third time was in high school. They were sixteen, and their grandma came to stay, but not until the second night. That first night they'd spent in Wren's bed, Wren holding Cath's wrists, Cath crying. (Rowell, 2013:171)

Arthur Avery's mental illness has a profound impact on his daughters, Cath and Wren, as they are forced to navigate their lives without a stable parental figure. Their mother has already abandoned them, and their father's erratic behavior further.

4.2.2 Chaotic Family Type

Chaotic family also known as a severely-disturbed family, children are poorly looked after or protected because the parents are busy, non-present, or abusive. In these households, inconsistency is the only constant. Family rules and expectations are unclear, and parents frequently come and go (moving in and moving out of the home, or are incarcerated). Children often experience abuse, neglect, or both.

No, Cath said. She's been through nothing. It was true. You name it, Cath's mom wasn't there for it. Why are we talking about her? (Rowell, 2013:70-71)

This quote shows the presence of a chaotic family type. Cath's mother is absent from her life, having missed significant moments and events. The lack of parental presence can lead to feelings of neglect and abandonment, causing emotional and psychological harm to the child. The lack of clear rules and expectations in chaotic families can create an environment where children do not learn the basic skills needed for social and emotional

development. The inconsistency of parental behavior can lead to confusion about what is acceptable and what is not.

4.2.3 Chronic Conflict Family Type

The chronic conflict family type is distinguished by frequent fights and disagreements that can be harmful to family members, particularly youngsters. This type of family dynamic frequently results in unsolved conflicts, antagonism, and tension, which can lead to chaos and dysfunction in the house. As a result of persistent stress and conflict, children might develop a variety of mental health issues, including anxiety and despair.

Parents in chronically conflicted families may resort to harmful behaviors such as verbal or physical abuse, which can have long-term negative consequences for the children. Children may feel powerless and unable to express themselves in this type of environment, leading to low self-esteem and self-doubt. Additionally, children may be more likely to repeat the same unhealthy patterns they witnessed in their own family, perpetuating negative cycles of behavior. The following quotations show the presence of a chronic conflict family type in the Avery family:

Cath and Wren had been sent home from school early that day, and their parents were already fighting when they got there. Her dad was upset, and her mom was crying.... And Cath thought at first that it was because of the World Trade Center; their teacher had told them about the airplanes. But that wasn't it, not exactly.... (Rowell, 2013:106)

Arthur argues a lot with his wife, sometimes it gets to the point of open fights in front of his child. These conflicts result in traumatic experiences for Cath and Wren. When they were little and their mom and dad would fight, Wren and Cath worried their parents were going to get divorced and split them up, just like in *The Parent Trap*. (Rowell, 2013:181)

Laura also feels like she is living the wrong life because of this constant arguing with Arthur, this can be seen in this following quotation, her mom kept saying, I'm done, Art. I'm just done. I'm living the wrong life. (Rowell, 2013:106)

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research and 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, bad communication, and role reversal. The Avery family can be characterized as having a pathological family type, chaotic family type, and chronic conflict family type.

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 sign 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.

REFERENCES

- B.T., A. (2021). The Family as the Basic Unit of Society. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 8(12), 201. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i12.3270>

- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. J. Aronson. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=-HdHAAAAMAAJ>
- Cox, W. T. L., Abramson, L. Y., Devine, P. G., & Hollon, S. D. (2012). Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Depression. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 7(5), 427–449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612455204>
- Dale, R., Shanley, D. C., Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Lines, K., Pickering, K., & White, C. (2016). Empowering and protecting children by enhancing knowledge, skills and well-being: A randomized trial of Learn to BE SAFE with Emmy™. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 51, 368–378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.07.016>
- Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (Eds.). (2001). *Interparental Conflict and Child Development*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511527838>
- Hunt, J. (2014). *Dysfunctional Family: Making Peace with Your Past [Hope For The Heart Series]*.
- Kerr, M. E., & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family Evaluation*. W. W. Norton. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=yO5RUvC59IsC>
- Masteller, J., & Stoop, D. (2011). *Forgiving Our Parents, Forgiving Ourselves: Healing Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families*. ReadHowYouWant.com, Limited. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=yMxQtZL2Wp0C>
- Morrison, J. K. (1977). The family heritage: Dysfunctional constructs and roles. *International Journal of Family Counseling*, 5(2), 54–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187708250262>
- Nurwakhidah, L., & Supsiadji, M. R. (2020). THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENT TOWARDS JEAN LA'BARGE IN LOUIS L'AMOUR'S SITKA. *Anaphora : Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, 3(1), 9-14. <https://doi.org/10.30996/anaphora.v3i1.3563>
- Openshaw, K. (2011). *The Relationship Between Family Functioning, Family Resilience, and Quality of Life Among Vocational Rehabilitation Clients*. 1–116. <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/1099/>
- Papero, D. V. (2014). Assisting the Two-person System: An Approach Based on the Bowen Theory. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 35(4), 386–397. <https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1079>
- Rowell, R. (2013). *Fangirl: A Novel*. St. Martin's Publishing Group. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=BfseA9a8xVMC>
- Stewart, A. L., & Ware, J. E. (1992). *Measuring Functioning and Well Being: The Medical Outcomes Study Approach*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Waites, C. (2009). *Building on Strengths: Intergenerational Practice with African*

American Families. *Social Work*, 54(3), 278–287.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/54.3.278>

Walsh, F. (2016). Family resilience: a developmental systems framework. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13(3), 313–324.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2016.1154035>

Zhang, T., & Wang, Z. (2020). The Effects of Family Functioning and Psychological Suzhi Between School Climate and Problem Behaviors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00212>