Fanaticism Reflected by Cath Avery's Character in The Novel *Fangirl*
(*Fanatisme yang Tercermin pada Karakter Cath Avery dalam Novel Fangirl*)

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study examines fanaticism as reflected in the characters of Rainbow Rowell's novel Fangirl, focusing on fanatical behavior and its underlying factors. Using a psychological approach to literary analysis, the study applies theories of fanaticism by Thorne and Bruner (2006) and Seregina, Koivisto, and Mattila (2011), along with Freud's motivation theory, to analyze the mental and emotional processes of the characters, particularly Cath Avery as a devoted fan of Simon Snow. The analysis reveals that fanaticism in the novel is characterized by obsessive attachment, emotional investment, and actions driven by an idealized perception of fictional narratives. Psychological needs such as escapism, validation, and identity formation significantly contribute to this behavior, while subconscious desires and past experiences further shape the characters' deep devotion. These findings offer insights into the psychological foundations of fanaticism in literature, illustrating how fictional works influence individual behavior and motivation. This study enhances the understanding of the intersection between psychology and literature, emphasizing how literary characters reflect real-life psychological tendencies. ***Abstrak*** *Studi ini menganalisis fanatisme yang tercermin dalam karakter novel Fangirl karya Rainbow Rowell, dengan fokus pada perilaku fanatik dan faktor-faktor yang melatarbelakanginya. Dengan pendekatan psikologi dalam analisis sastra, penelitian ini menerapkan teori fanatisme dari Thorne dan Bruner (2006) serta Seregina, Koivisto, dan Mattila (2011), bersama dengan teori motivasi Freud, untuk mengkaji proses mental dan emosional karakter, khususnya Cath Avery sebagai penggemar setia Simon Snow. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa fanatisme dalam novel ini ditandai oleh keterikatan obsesif, investasi emosional, serta tindakan yang dipengaruhi oleh persepsi idealistik terhadap narasi fiksi. Kebutuhan psikologis seperti pelarian dari kenyataan (escapism), validasi diri, dan pembentukan identitas berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap perilaku ini, sementara keinginan bawah sadar dan pengalaman masa lalu semakin memperkuat pengabdian mendalam para karakter. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan tentang dasar psikologis fanatisme dalam sastra, menunjukkan bagaimana karya fiksi dapat memengaruhi perilaku dan motivasi individu. Studi ini memperkaya pemahaman tentang hubungan antara psikologi dan sastra, menyoroti bagaimana karakter sastra mencerminkan kecenderungan psikologis dalam kehidupan nyata.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's modern era, idolizing a celebrity has become an undeniable cultural phenomenon, giving rise to fandom. According to Chung et al. (2018), fans are individuals who not only admire but also deeply engage with the object of their devotion, making them more than just passive audiences. Fans participate in discussions, create and share content, and build communities based on shared interests—an interactive and immersive process called fandom (Groene & Hettinger, 2016). This phenomenon often leads to various forms of fanaticism, which can be viewed on a spectrum from mild enthusiasm to extreme obsession. Tietjen (2023) defines fanaticism as an identity-defining devotion pursued with extraordinary enthusiasm, highlighting its potential influence on personal behavior and self-perception.

The evolution of fandom, particularly in the digital age, has shifted audience engagement from passive media consumption to active participation (Ha, 2020), a transformation conceptualized in Jenkins' (2018) participatory culture framework. One of the most prominent fan activities is fanfiction, which allows individuals to creatively reimagine narratives, strengthen emotional connections with fictional characters, and construct their interpretations of stories (Hawkins, 2022). *Fangirl* by Rowell (2013) illustrates this dynamic through the character of Cath Avery, an introverted college student whose unwavering devotion to the fictional Simon Snow series drives her to write extensive fanfiction. Unlike her twin sister Wren, who distances herself from fandom, Cath immerses herself in her idol's world, using fanfiction as both an emotional escape and a means of reconstructing her identity in response to personal insecurities and past experiences.

While previous studies have explored fandom as a means of self-expression, social belonging, and creative production (Zubernis & Larsen, 2018; Kilian, 2023), there remains a gap in understanding the deeper psychological mechanisms behind individual fanaticism, particularly as portrayed in literary narratives. Most research has focused on the sociocultural impact of fandom (Kusuma et al., 2020; Reysen et al., 2024) but fewer studies have examined the internal motivations that drive obsessive fan behaviors and their implications for identity development. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how *Fangirl* presents fanaticism as a complex psychological process influenced by emotional attachment, escapism, and personal validation. By situating Cath's experience within the broader discourse of fandom and psychological theory, this research provides new insights into the fine line between admiration and obsession. Furthermore, it extends the discussion of fanaticism beyond media studies into the realm of literary analysis, offering a fresh perspective on how fictional narratives can shape real-world behavior and identity formation.

By examining Cath's struggles, this study aims to illustrate both the positive and negative implications of fanaticism, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balanced engagement with fandom. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of fanaticism as a multifaceted phenomenon that extends beyond literature into various cultural contexts, including sports, celebrity worship, and online communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Psychology of Literature

Literary psychology is a discipline that examines literary works from the perspective of human behavior or psyche, as reflected through the characters in a story (Aras, 2015). According to Wellek and Warren (1956), literary psychology encompasses four main interpretations: studying the author's psychology, the creative process, psychological principles in literary works, and the impact of literature on readers. This approach integrates mental and creative aspects into the analysis of literary texts, emphasizing how characters and psychological elements in literature reflect human life. Through an interdisciplinary framework, literary psychology provides profound insights into the psychological dimensions of literary works from both the author's and the reader's perspectives (Potter et al., 2023).

This research utilizes *Fangirl* by Rowell (2013) to analyze the psychological dimensions, particularly the character motivations that represent fanaticism toward idols. The novel was chosen because

its story portrays the life of a fangirl with enthusiasm and fandom productivity through fan-made narratives. The study focuses on the personalities and actions of the characters in the novel to explore and reveal the embedded psychological meanings. This approach aims to understand how fanaticism is expressed in the characters' lives and connect it with relevant psychological theories.

2.2 Theory of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis, founded by Freud (2014), is a comprehensive theory that explores the unconscious mind, instincts, and aggressiveness as key regulators of human behavior. Freud's Motivation Theory suggests that unconscious desires rooted in early childhood experiences shape human actions. The theory divides the mind into three components: the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. Additionally, Freud introduces the id, ego, and superego, which represent biological desires, rational mediation, and moral principles, respectively. Key elements of his theory include the unconscious mind's influence, the pleasure principle, and the impact of childhood experiences on personality and behavior.

In literary studies, psychoanalysis is often used to analyze characters as representations of the author's creativity, providing insights into the author's psychological state (Pratiwi et al., 2019; Chernysh et al. 2021). Freud's theory is particularly relevant to themes such as dreams, fantasies, and myths, which are central to literature (Erdelyi, 2024). While some argue that Freud's theory is limited to exploring the origins of literary works, others, like Milner (2005), highlight its broader applicability. Freud's framework offers a bridge between psychology and literature by revealing unconscious elements in language and narrative (Prabitha, 2023). This connection underscores psychoanalysis' potential to uncover hidden psychological dimensions in literary texts, making it a valuable tool for literary analysis.

2.3 Fanaticism

Fanaticism is an extraordinary and often excessive devotion to an object, person, or activity, characterized by passion, loyalty, and emotional attachment. It involves internal and external engagement, a desire to possess items related to the object, and social interaction within a like-minded community. Fanaticism can manifest as celebrity worship syndrome or excessive admiration, sometimes leading to psychological or social issues. Thorne and Bruner (2006) outline its aspects, including internal involvement, external involvement, the desire to own, and social interaction. Characteristics like loyalty, devotion, love, and attachment further define fanaticism, highlighting its deep emotional and psychological roots.

Fanaticism plays a significant role in modern culture, marketing, and social dynamics, influencing individual behaviors and societal interactions. It has evolved beyond religious contexts to encompass fandom in sports, entertainment, and consumer culture. Marimaa (2011) emphasizes that fanaticism, while sometimes used broadly, involves an intense and uncritical interest in a subject or idea. Fan productivity, as described by Fiske (2002), includes semiotic production (deriving personal meaning from fandom), enunciative productivity (expressing fandom through speech or actions), and text production (creating fan content such as fanfiction or fan art). These activities reinforce fans' social identities and their connections within fan communities.

Fanaticism's influence extends to adolescents, who are particularly vulnerable due to their desire for uniqueness and limited self-awareness. This phenomenon fosters active participation in interpreting popular works, moving beyond passive consumption. In this context, fans contribute creatively to their fandoms through various forms of media, differentiating themselves from non-fans. While fanaticism can inspire enthusiasm and community, it also underscores the need for balance to prevent negative consequences associated with extreme or obsessive behavior.

2.4 Character

Character is a fundamental element of literary works, serving as a medium for readers to understand the narrative. Stanton (1965) defines a character as the individual performing actions in a story, while Milligan and Milligan (1983) categorize characters into major and minor roles. The major character plays a central role, often experiencing conflicts, emotions, and events that drive the story. In contrast, minor characters have a limited presence and primarily support the main narrative. In *Fangirl*, characterization is key, with the author depicting characters through their physical attributes, actions, and thoughts. This process, as described by Rohrberger and Woods (1971), allows readers to discern the personalities and traits of the characters, enhancing their connection to the story.

The reviewed studies explore various aspects of fanaticism and fan identity through different lenses. Rahayu and Retnaningdyah (2023) analyzed *Fangirl* by Rowell (2013), focusing on how fanfiction aids the protagonist in reconstructing her fan identity into a positive and creative one, enabling her to thrive in cyberspace and her personal life. Another study by Syafar (2017) examined fanaticism in the *Green Street Hooligans* movie, using Marimaa's (2011) theory to identify fanaticism characteristics through descriptive qualitative analysis. Lastly, Pratiwi (2015) explored religious fanaticism in *Carrie* by examining its negative societal impact and the tensions it creates. The current research differs by focusing on *Fangirl* with a psychological approach, analyzing the protagonist's personality and motivations as a fanfiction writer using

Freudian motivation theory and the theoretical foundation of fanaticism. This study uniquely highlights the connection between fanaticism, identity formation, and fandom productivity.

3.   METHOD

This study employs qualitative methods, a psychological approach, and descriptive analysis to explore the concept of fanaticism as reflected in a story character. It focuses on fanaticism displayed by a fan who creates a new world for their idol through fanfiction and analyzes the character's motivations. Qualitative methodologies gather and examine various cultural writings, such as novels, journals, and recorded data, offering a detailed and comprehensive view. These methods emphasize understanding participants' experiences, beliefs, and interpretations, as outlined by Lim (2024), aiming to explain widespread phenomena.

The research focuses on the main character in Rowell's (2013) *Fangirl* and employs psychoanalytic literature as the analytical framework. This psychological approach examines human behavior and mentality as reflected in the characters. The study applies relevant psychoanalytic theories to analyze character motivations related to fanaticism and fan productivity in creating fanfiction. As Pourkhalkhali et al. (2024) suggest, such analysis delves deeper into the characters' conduct and inherent psychological factors, revealing motivations and behaviors tied to fan identity and creativity.

Psychoanalysis also critically examines literary works by revealing the psychological nuances of characters and authors. According to Hossain (2017), this approach highlights alterations, distortions, and psychological dimensions in literature, offering valuable insights into the creative process and character psychology. The research object, *Fangirl*, published in 2013 by St. Martin Press, spans 38 chapters and 445 pages. The study draws its data from character quotations within the novel, emphasizing the protagonist's psychological depth and her engagement in fanfiction as a form of fanaticism.

3.1   Procedures

The researcher employs a reading technique to collect data for this study, following several steps. First, the novel *Fangirl* is read multiple times to gather accurate and relevant information. During this process, important elements are noted, focusing on text that reflects characterization, such as thought patterns, emotions, and behaviors indicative of fanaticism. This includes identifying rigid thinking, absolute beliefs, intense emotions, and obsessive actions through dialogues, internal monologues, and behavioral descriptions. Each selected quote is evaluated for its contextual significance, emphasizing motivations behind fanaticism, psychological defense mechanisms, and its impact on character development. Finally, the collected data is classified and evaluated to address the research problems, identifying examples of character fanaticism and motivations within the narrative.

3.2   Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study involves several steps to ensure validity and relevance to the research problems. First, the collected data is reviewed and classified according to its alignment with the research questions. Next, the researcher examines aspects of the main character's personality, focusing on the forms of fanaticism and the motivations displayed. To analyze the character, methods outlined by Stanton (1965) are used, including evaluating the character's words, behavior, conversations, and actions. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the analysis to provide insights into the character's fanaticism and motivations.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   The Psychological Foundations of Fanaticism: Cath's Emotional Attachment to Simon Snow

Fanaticism often stems from deep emotional connections, and in Fangirl, Cath Avery's attachment to Simon Snow is rooted in both personal and psychological factors. Her immersion in the Simon Snow fandom is not just about admiration; it functions as an emotional anchor. Cath's obsession is heavily influenced by attachment theory, which suggests that individuals seek comfort in stable and familiar emotional bonds. Given the instability in her life—her mother's abandonment, her father's mental health struggles, and her twin sister Wren's growing distance—Simon Snow becomes a source of emotional security.

From a psychological standpoint, Cath's engagement with the Simon Snow universe serves as a coping mechanism. Her obsessive writing of fanfiction allows her to exert control over a world that remains consistent, unlike her real-life circumstances. This aligns with Freud's pleasure principle, where individuals seek pleasure and avoid pain. Cath's reluctance to detach from Simon Snow reflects her attempt to maintain emotional stability through a structured, predictable narrative that contrasts with the unpredictability of her personal life.

Moreover, her social anxiety exacerbates her need for a parasocial relationship with Simon Snow and Baz. She avoids forming new relationships in college, opting instead to interact with the world through fan communities. This obsessive connection exemplifies escapism theory, which posits that individuals

engage in fictional worlds as a way to escape stress and anxiety. Thus, Cath's fanaticism is not merely about being a devoted fan but is deeply rooted in her psychological need for security and belonging.

4.2   Fan Culture and Participatory Identity: Cath's Role as a Content Creator

Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture provides insight into Cath's deep involvement in fandom. Unlike passive consumers of media, participatory fans actively engage by producing, modifying, and expanding on original content. Cath embodies this concept through her fanfiction, Carry On, which reinterprets and deepens the Simon Snow universe. This participatory aspect is essential to her identity, as her creative contributions to the fandom shape her self-perception and social interactions.

Her writing is not merely an act of devotion but also a medium for self-expression and validation. Fanfiction offers her a structured way to engage with literature while maintaining a sense of ownership over her favorite characters. Her immense following in the fan community reinforces her sense of purpose and worth. However, this intense involvement creates an insular experience, where she struggles to engage with literary creativity beyond fanfiction. This becomes evident when she resists her professor's insistence on producing original fiction, highlighting the tension between personal passion and academic expectations.

Furthermore, her reluctance to abandon Simon Snow reflects a deeper struggle common in fandom culture—letting go of a fictional world that has provided emotional and creative fulfillment. This highlights the fine line between participatory engagement and dependency, illustrating how fanaticism can both empower and restrict personal growth.

4.3   The Social and Emotional Isolation of Fanaticism

While fandom often serves as a social bridge, fanaticism can also lead to emotional and social isolation. Cath's deep immersion in the Simon Snow fandom hinders her ability to adapt to college life. Unlike her twin sister Wren, who actively seeks new experiences and friendships, Cath remains confined to her dorm, hesitant to engage with her peers. This self-imposed isolation underscores how excessive fandom involvement can serve as both a refuge and a barrier to real-world socialization.

Cath's avoidance of new environments, including something as routine as going to the dining hall, demonstrates how her fanaticism exacerbates her social anxiety. Instead of forging new relationships, she clings to online fandom communities, reinforcing her dependence on a virtual support system rather than real-life interactions. This detachment from reality exemplifies fanatic escapism, where excessive devotion to a fictional world prevents personal development and social adaptation.

Her interactions with Reagan and Levi further highlight the challenges of balancing fandom and reality. Reagan, her straightforward and socially adept roommate, often criticizes Cath for her reclusive tendencies, forcing her to confront her detachment. Levi, on the other hand, represents a bridge between her fandom identity and real-world relationships. His encouragement of her original writing marks a turning point, pushing her to engage beyond the confines of Simon Snow. This contrast in relationships illustrates how fanaticism, when left unchecked, can limit social growth but can also be navigated with the right support system.

4.4   The Evolution of Cath's Fanaticism: Growth and Reconciliation

Throughout Fangirl, Cath undergoes significant personal growth, learning to balance her passion for Simon Snow with the realities of adulthood. Initially, she resists change, fearing that stepping away from Simon Snow means losing a core part of her identity. However, her journey demonstrates that fanaticism does not have to be abandoned but rather redefined.

A crucial moment of transformation occurs when she chooses to complete her original fiction assignment instead of exclusively writing Carry On. This signifies a shift from derivative creation to self-authored storytelling. It reflects her ability to apply the skills she honed in fanfiction to broader creative pursuits, indicating that her passion for Simon Snow can evolve rather than be discarded.

Her eventual acceptance of new experiences—forming friendships, pursuing a romantic relationship with Levi, and embracing original fiction—demonstrates how fandom can coexist with real-world development. This resolution supports the idea that fanaticism, when channeled productively, can foster growth rather than hinder it. Cath's journey ultimately embodies a transition from excessive escapism to a balanced appreciation of both fiction and reality, illustrating that devotion to a fictional world does not have to come at the cost of personal progress.

In summary, Cath's fanaticism in Fangirl is a multifaceted phenomenon that intertwines psychological, social, and creative dimensions. Her attachment to Simon Snow is deeply rooted in her need for emotional stability, serving as both a refuge and a source of personal identity. While her participation in fandom culture allows her to develop creative skills and gain social validation, it also acts as a barrier to personal and academic growth.

However, Cath's character arc highlights an essential lesson: fanaticism is not inherently negative but must be navigated with balance. Her ability to reconcile her passion for Simon Snow with her evolving identity demonstrates the transformative potential of fandom. By the novel's conclusion, Cath's journey illustrates that fanaticism, when approached with self-awareness and adaptability, can be a catalyst for personal and creative development rather than an obstacle to growth.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The analysis of fanaticism in *Fangirl* highlights how Cath Avery's attachment to Simon Snow serves as both a form of escapism and a means of self-discovery. Her devotion to fanfiction and the fictional world reflects deep emotional needs, shaped by the pleasure principle and childhood experiences. Cath's journey illustrates how fanaticism can provide comfort and identity but also create barriers to personal growth and social interactions. The novel's narrative structure further enhances the exploration of fandom, showing that while deep emotional investment in fictional worlds can be fulfilling, personal development requires a balance between fantasy and reality. Ultimately, *Fangirl* presents fanaticism as a complex phenomenon—both a source of emotional support and a challenge that must be navigated for individual growth.

5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

Given the findings of this study, future research on fanaticism should explore its broader psychological and sociocultural implications. Comparative studies could examine how different types of fandoms—such as sports, music, and gaming—affect personal identity and social behavior. Additionally, incorporating contemporary theories of media consumption and digital communities would provide a more comprehensive understanding of fan engagement in the digital age. Educators and psychologists may also benefit from recognizing how fandom participation can serve as a coping mechanism for individuals facing anxiety or social difficulties. Finally, literature and media studies should continue to analyze how fan culture influences storytelling and audience interaction, offering insights into the evolving relationship between fiction and real-life experiences.

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