THE REPRESENTATION OF FANDOM DISCOURSE IN RAINBOW ROWELL'S *FANGIRL*

THESIS

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JEMBER UNIVERSITY
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Presented to the English Department,

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DEDICATION

This thesis is proudly dedicated to my father, Sugeng Santoso, my mother, Sulis Setyowati and my sister, Nuning Rachmawati for never ending love and support throughout my life.

MOTTO

"The reality you live in is partially up to you.
The fantasy you live in is partially up to you."
(Nazwa Zebian)

DECLARATION

I hereby state that this thesis entitled **"The Representation of Fandom Discourse in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl"*** is an original piece of writing. I declare that the analysis and the result in this thesis have not already been submitted for any other degree or any publication. I certify to the best of my knowledge that all resources used and any helps received in the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

Jember, 14 September 2016

The writer,

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SUMMARY

THE REPRESENTATION OF FANDOM DISCOURSE IN RAINBOW ROWELL'S *FANGIRL*; Maya Novita Sari, 120110101007; 2016; 51 pages; English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Jember University.

This research analyzes the construction of fandom discourse represented in the novel *Fangirl*. Fandom is the community-centered creation of artistic fannish expression such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan video which are mirrored in the creation of the book, with constant manipulation, renegotiation, commenting, and revising, all done electronically among group of people, mostly women, intimately involved in the creation and consumption of fannish goods. People think about fandom in two different ways. Some people who adore something and become a part of fandom see it as a common thing. On the other hand some people see fandom as a useless activity and give a bad perspective to people who are active in fandom.

This research uses qualitative method which means the data are taken from written material. The primary data are narrations, dialogues and statements in the novel that are related to fandom discourse. The secondary data are taken from books, journals and other recourses that give information and facts about fandom. To find the fandom discourse, this research uses the theory of representation: constructionist approach by Stuart Hall as the main tool. In addition, this research uses encoding/decoding by Stuart Hall to break down the position of the characters in the novel related to fandom; either they belong to the dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position or oppositional position. Furthermore this thesis analyzes the critical position of the author by relating the discourse of fandom with the information about the author.

The result of this research shows that *Fangirl* represents the all three hypothetical positions of decoding process. The construction of fandom discourse
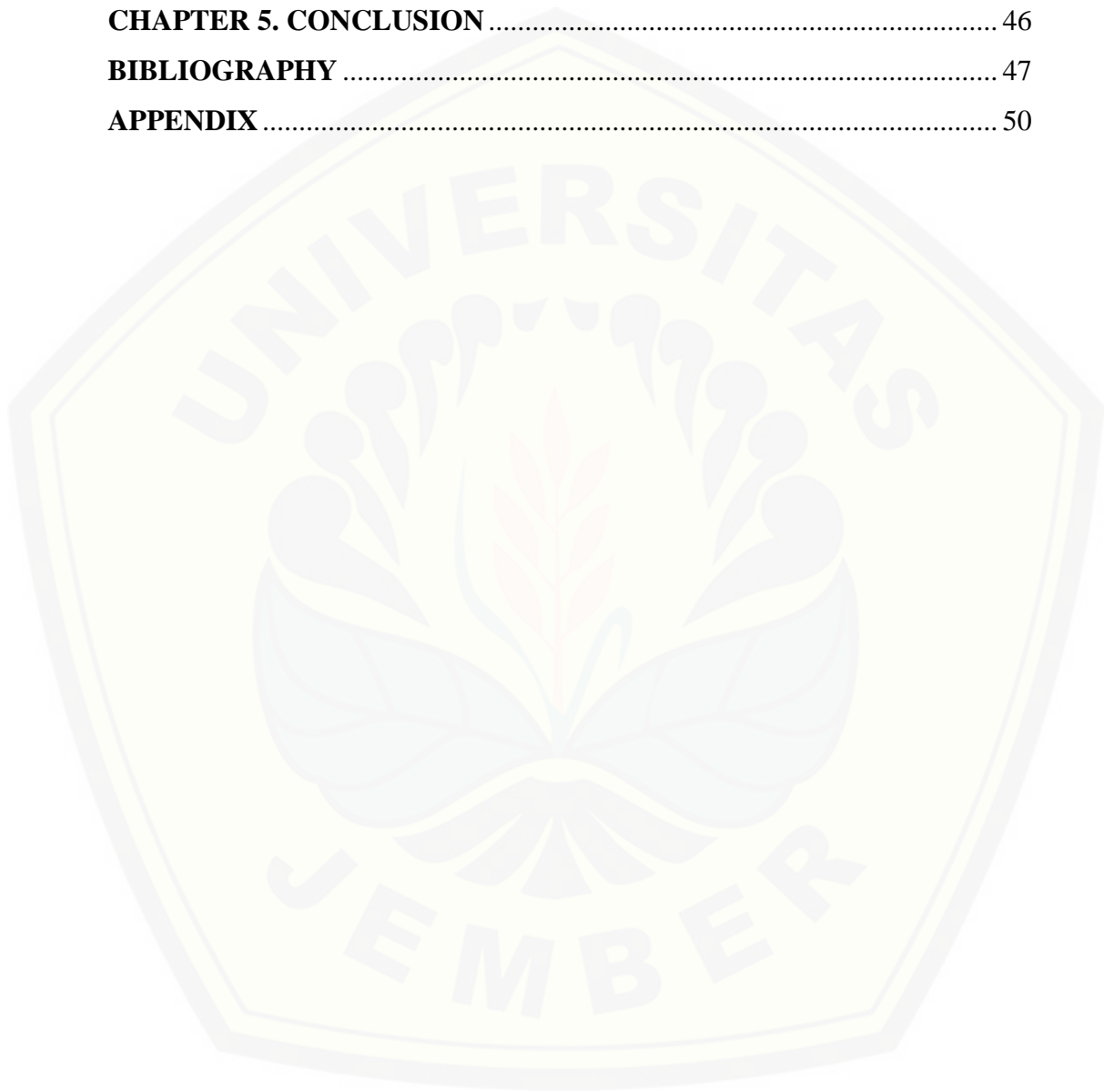
in the novel closely relates to today's American society thoughts of fandom; they partly reject and partly agree with the work of fandom. Nowadays, fans do not only become a passive consumer but also a producer. On the other hand, the author of *Fangirl* puts the original products as the products that are more worth-appreciating than fan products particularly fan fiction. Rowell puts back to its hierarchy that the position of sub culture is underneath the dominant culture.

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CHAPTER 1.INTRODUCTION

The first chapter is the overview that gives the reader description about the whole research. It consists of the background of study and the reasons why this research is conducted, the problem to discuss, the research questions and also the goals of this research.

1.1 The Background of Study

Fandom is abbreviation of fan kingdom. According to Busse and Hellekson (2001:6) "fandom is the community-centered creation of artistic fannish expression such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan video which are mirrored in the creation of the book, with constant manipulation, renegotiation, commenting, and revising, all done electronically among group of people, mostly women, intimately involved in the creation and consumption of fannish goods." The examples of the most popular fandom are the fandom of The Lord of The Ring, Harry Potter, Hunger Games, Game of Thrones, Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Who, etc. Then to explain the description of fan itself, Joli Jenson cited in (Lewis, 1992:9) states that the fan is consistently characterized (referencing the original terms) as a potential fanatic. In other words, fan is a person who is really interested in and adores something. Fan activity that is included into the fandom becomes a culture. Fandom is categorized into popular culture that is subordinated by some people.

In the modern cyber era like nowadays, popular culture is a familiar thing in the human life. John Storey (2008:5), states that "an obvious starting point in any attempt to define popular culture is to say that popular culture is simply culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people." In other words popular culture is a simply culture that develops in a group of people who have same ideas or perspectives to something. The examples of common popular culture are fashion, music, books, movies or something iconic that have already become a

trend. Young people who usually like those things also even become fans. Fandom is a culture which belongs to popular culture and also subordinate culture because not all people widely favour and well-liked into it even subordinates this culture. In fact some people see fandom as a useless activity and give a bad perspective to people who are active in it.

Popular culture that is subordinated by some people is called subculture. Based on Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (2003:13), "sub-cultures are sub-sets— smaller, more localized and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks." In other words, subculture is smaller culture which has a different perspective with a larger cultural network (popular culture). Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (2003:206) add statement that subcultures can only exist underneath the dominant culture; they cannot exist within it. In other words, the position of subculture is underneath the popular or dominant culture. The examples of subculture are fandom, graffiti, hardcore punk, underground hip-hop, etc. The phenomena of fandom, popular culture and subculture do not only exist in a real life. Some authors use those phenomena as the idea of their literature products.

Literature is a written product that relates to thought and feeling. The source of literature is a human life experience that can be from the author's experience or a nearby society condition of the author. Wellek and Warren (1956:94) state that "literature represents "life" and life in large measure, in social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of individual have also been object of literary imitation." This statement strengthens that source of literature is a reality that happens in human life. It influences the author to express it in a written form as a literary product.

As a representation of human life, literature shows issues and phenomena in the society. Among bunch of issues and phenomena in the society, fandom issue is one of most interesting topic to be discussed. As we know nowadays, people think about fandom in two different ways. Some people who adore something and become a part of fandom see it as a common thing. However, in the other hand some people always go to the negative stereotype when they think about fandom.

In this research I choose novel written by Rainbow Rowell entitled *Fangirl*. It is Rowell's second novel. This novel was published in 2013 and chosen by *New York Times* as the best young adult fiction of the year. *Fangirl* tells about Cath as the female main character who is a fan of fictional characters from *Simon Snow* novel series written by Gemma T. Leslie. Generally, Rowell describes Cath as a typical fan girl who buys the merchants and stuffs related to the novel she likes and writes fan fiction. She cannot differentiate her real life and delusional thoughts and prefers to communicate with her cyber friends who read her writings rather than her new college friends and her roommate in the dorm.

After reading *Fangirl* for the first time, it may seem that there is only a story about a young girl who is interested in the fictional character in Gemma T. Leslie's book series. From *Fangirl*, I assume that the readers only find how Rowell portrays a life of twins, a fan's life, a romance relationship between two young male and female, a university life, etc. thus I think there are more things to discuss than just those portrayals. Based on the issues this research proposes to analyze fandom discourse in *Fangirl*. This research uses the theory of representation: constructionist approach by Stuart Hall as the main tool to get the relationship of fandom discourse in the novel and fandom phenomena in the real society. Then, the phenomena of fandom in the novel will be analyzed using encoding/decoding. The explanation about the theory of representation and encoding/decoding will be described in the next chapter.

1.2 Problem to Discuss

Through the issues I find in the novel *Fangirl* written by Rainbow Rowell, there are some problems that is worthy to be discussed. The main point of this research is to know how the novel *Fangirl* represents fandom discourse. To overcome the problems I make three research questions. They are:

1. How does the novel represent fandom discourse?
2. How is the context of fandom discourse constructed in the real society?
3. What is the author's critical position?

1.3 The Goals of Study

There are several goals of making this research. They are:

1. to describe how the novel represents fandom discourse

2. to explain the context of fandom in the real society

3. to find the author's critical position

CHAPTER 2.LITERATURE REVIEW

The second chapter is literature review which contains three sub chapters. The first is previous research done by other researchers. The second is the representation theory by Stuart Hall. Then, the last is the explanation about encoding/decoding.

2.1 Previous Research

Previous research is a previous work that has been done by other researchers and has a relation to the topic in this research. Laws et al. cited in Blaxter (2006:122) states that research is greatly strengthened by placing your new information in the context of what is already known about the issue. Researchers call this process as 'doing a literature search', 'survey', or 'doing a literature review' or 'study'. It can be reffered that previous research is used to help the researcher to get information that is related to the topic. From the previous research we can search, review or study about the similar topic or theory. Furthermore, it helps us to write our research.

The first previous research is Viyantini Rakita Sari's thesis entitled *The Representation of Beauty Discourse by Media Text in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye,* (2015). The purpose of her thesis is to find how beauty discourse is constructed by media text that leads to Afro-American women's oppression in the novel *The Bluest Eye* and what is the ideology beyond the representation of beauty discourse by media text in the novel. To do her thesis, she applies the theory of representation and encoding/decoding process by Stuart Hall. Those theories are used as the main tools to complete the two purposes of her thesis.

I choose Viyantini's thesis as my previous research because I find that we have the same theories to discuss, they are the theory of representation and encoding/decoding process by Stuart Hall. I use her thesis as a model of applying

the method. Through her research, I can study more about representation theory and the way to use that theory to analyze the data from different novel, *Fangirl*. Her thesis focuses on the beauty discourse in the novel *The Bluest Eye* and my thesis focuses on the fandom discourse in the novel *Fangirl*. Therefore, here we have different main topics to be discussed.

The second one is Angela Thomas's journal entitled *Fan Fiction Online: Engagement, Critical Response and Affective Play through Writing,* (2006). Her journal describes fan fiction, social practice of fan fiction, fictional role-playing and collaborative writing. She also describes that fan fiction is as a means for critical response and identity play.

In her thesis Angela Thomas concluded that young people in the online fan fiction communities reflecting a new way of thinking about writing that challenges the traditional notion of the single, individual author. Angela Thomas (2006:237) states that *Middle Earth Insanity* (fan fiction online community), provides a site of new hybrid text where writing is a response to reading, an exploration and critique of texts, an assemblage of new ideas about texts, and an active collaborative process of understanding, creating and imagining. Beyond writing, the fan fiction communities provide spaces for exploring, discovering and celebrating the strengths of individuals as they play together to create a culture that ultimately values writing, narrative and story. Based on her journal we can find that there is not only a bad perspective about fandom. It shows that writing fan fiction can lead the author from being amateur writer to professional one. I use her journal as one of my previous research because it gives me information about how fan fiction influences a fan's life. Fan fiction is one of fandom activity.

2.2 Theory of Representation

The theory of representation by Stuart Hall is seen as an appropriate theory to support this research. Stuart Hall (1997:15) says that representation is an essential part of process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves the use of language, signs and images which stand for or

represent things. It means that language, signs and images are media to produce and exchange meaning to the members of culture.

Stuart Hall (1997:17) states that there are two systems of representation; they are mental representation and language. Mental representation is all things that we carry around our heads. Meaning depends on the systems of concepts and images formed in our thought which can stand for or represent the world. The second is language. Hall says that to represent or exchange meanings and concepts, we can only do that when we have access to share language (1997:18). Based on two systems of representation by Hall, it means that all of concepts in our mind can be shared to others by language.

A process of constructing meaning may not be same as other cultures. To produce the same meaning with others, people should have the same cultural background. It is strengthened by Hall. He says that just as people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must also share the same way of interpreting the sign of a language, for only in this way meaning can be effectively exchanged between people (1997:19).

In Stuart Hall's theory of representation there are three approaches of representation. They are *reflective, intentional and constructionist*. Those three approaches lead to know how representation of meaning works through language. According to Hall in the *reflective approach,* meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world and language functions like mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists (1997:24). It means that language as a mirror that reflects things like people or phenomenon that already exists in the real life to the text. The second is *intentional approach*. Hall says that language expresses the author or speaker's personal intended meaning that imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language (1997:25). This statement refers that unique meaning is not only built by the author's mind or speaker's personal. Language is social system through and through. It means that in order to exchange the meaning, the thought of the author or personal speakers must be negotiated with the other meaning that already exists in the system of language. The third and the last approach of representation is *constructionist approach*. Hall

states that constructionist approach uses language to represent the author's concepts. The representational system, concepts and signs through the language is used to exchange the meaning and in order to communicate the concept meaningfully to others (1997:25).

Based on three approaches of representation, the third way, constructionist approach is the closest approach to do this research. The data of this research is taken from the novel by Rainbow Rowell titled *Fangirl*. This novel is constructed by sentences, dialogues and narrations that consist of language. Through constructionist approach where the meaning is produced and constructed by the language, we can know how the fandom discourse is represented in the novel.

Stuart Hall states that there are two ways of constructionist approach. First is using semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure, Swiss Linguist and the second is using discourse with discursive method by Stuart Hall. For more focus, this research applies discursive method to find the discourse of fandom which is constructed in the novel.

Discourse in literature is not a study about language. It refers to the phenomena or event. Cited in Hall (1997:44) Foucault said that discourse is a group of statements which provides a language for talking about a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historical moment. It means that, discourse is a system of representation. It is strengthened by his following statement that discourse constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. It shows that discourse in a text is used to construct knowledge (topic). The knowledge is delivered through a language which is constructed in a sentences, dialogues and narrations. When we use constructionist approach combining with discourse, it means that we analyze the data by the knowledge that is constructed in the sentences, dialogues and narrations in the text.

Based on the explanation above, the representation theory will be the main tool to do this research. In detail, the constructionist approach and discursive

method are applied in order to find the discourse of fandom constructed in the novel *Fangirl.*

2.3 Encoding/Decoding

In order to make this research goes further, I try to analyze the social life in the novel using encoding/decoding concept by Stuart Hall. I do this because I find the different perspective of the characters in the novel in the way they interpret text; novel series entitled *Simon Snow* written by Gemma T. Leslie. The descriptions about Encoding/decoding are below.

Message can be transferred through the communication. Language is a powerful mass-communication to create the way of people thinking, receive and understand the message they create. Stuart Hall makes a concept of the communication process. Hall (2005:117) has conceptualized the process of communication in terms of circulation circuit or loop. This model has been criticized for linearity (sender/message/receiver) for its concentration on the level of message exchange and for the absence of a structured conception of the different moments as a complex structure of relations. Equals to, there are relationship between the sender, the message and the receiver. The three components build a communication in order to transfer the meaning of the message from the sender to the receiver. Through the concept of the linear communication it can be seen that the first component will influence the next component. In addition Hall makes a scheme to explain the process of transferring message from the sender to the receiver. The diagram below in the next page:
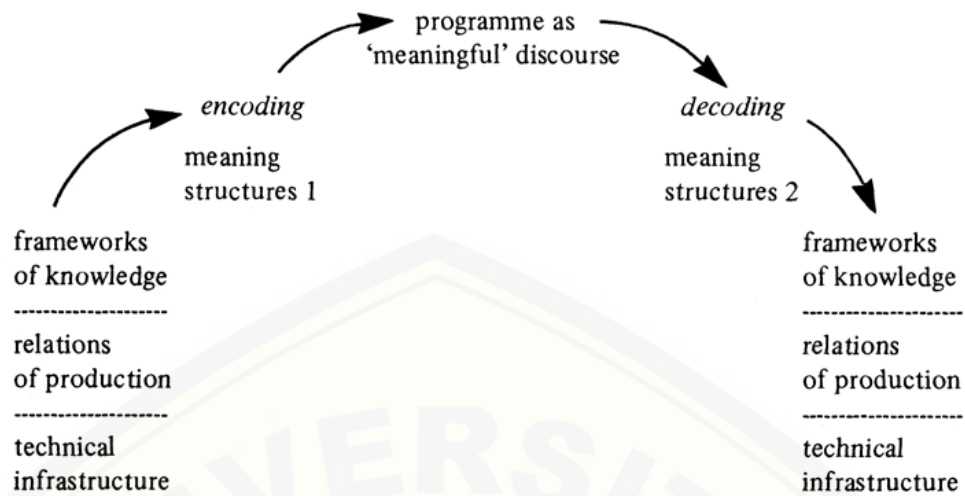
Picture 1 (Hall, 2005: 120)

From the diagram above it can be seen that the way to produce the *meaning1*, the sender needs *frameworks of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure*. According to Hall (2005:118) the production process is framed throughout by meanings and ideas. The ideas may come from knowledge in use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professionals ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, in which assumptions about the audience and so on frame constitution of the program through this production structure. The process of producing *'meaning1'* is called *encoding* and the people who do encoding process are called *encoder*. The result of encoding process is called *meaningful discourse*. It is given to the society. The next process is transferring message from the sender. It is called *decoding*. In other words decoding process is the process of the receiver in interpreting the message from the sender. The people who do this process are called *decoder*. The meaning of the message is not only produced by the encoder but also the decoder (readers, audiences, and listeners). They can be free to interpret the meaning of the message based on their background of knowledge.

Hall (2005:119) states that *'meaning structure1'* and *'meaning structure2'* may not be the same. They do not constitute an 'immediate identity'. The codes of

encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. The degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relation of equivalence) established between the position of the 'personifications', encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. In order to know a connection between the decoder and encoder, Hall offers three hypothetical positions of decoding by readers/audiences/listeners; they are *dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position and oppositional position*.

The first position of decoding is *dominant hegemonic position*. Stuart Hall (2005:125) states that:

> When the viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer *is operating inside the dominant code.* This is the ideal-typical case of 'perfectly transparent communication'—or as close as we are likely to come to it 'for all practical purposes'.

From the quotation above it can be seen that the decoder takes connotation meaning from the message produced by the encoder. The message is encoded directly through the dominant codes.

The second position is negotiated position. Hall (2005:127) states that:

> Decoding within the *negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at amore restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule. It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions', to its own more *corporate* positions. This negotiated version of the dominant ideology is thus shot through with contradictions, though these are only on certain occasions brought to full visibility. Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power.

From the quotation above it can be seen that the position of the readers/audiences/listeners is between accepting and rejecting. They understand

and share the dominant code in the message produced by the encoder but sometimes they build their own thinking towards it.

The last position of decoding is the oppositional position. Stuart Hall (2005:127) states that the oppositional position is a position to readers/audiences/listeners that are contra with the message from the decoder. They are who belong to this position are used to read the message in a negotiated way then begin to be given an oppositional reading. They understand the message but they do not share the text code.

The three hypothetical positions of the decoding are used to find how the readers/audiences/listeners construct the meaning of the message from the producers. In the novel *Fangirl*, there is also the process of production meaning. The meaning is constructed through the phenomena of fandom in the novel. The main character and the supporting characters have a different way of thinking to interpret a text. Hence, through the three hypothetical positions of decoding offered by Stuart Hall, it helps to find and know how the fandom discourse is constructed in the novel, *Fangirl*.

CHAPTER 3.RESEARCH METHOD

The third chapter is the description of methodology which is used to do this research. It consists of the type of research, how the data is collected, and also methods to process and analyze the data for the research purposes.

3.1 Type of Research

This research uses qualitative method. Blaxter (2006: 64) says, "Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with collecting and analyzing information in as many forms, chiefly non-numeric, as possible." In the other words this research is non-numeric research. It analyses form of words, sentences and also the narrations that are taken from the novel *Fangirl*. I use qualitative research to find the phenomena in the novel that is related to the fandom discourse as the main discussion of this research and to collect all the data about fandom discourse in a real life on books, journals and articles. The result of the data can be analyzed using theory of representation by Stuart Hall.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection is one of important steps to do research. According to Blaxter (2006:154) there are four ways to collect the data. They are documents, interviews, observations and questioners. The data in this research are collected based on documentary method (documents). In addition Blaxter (2006: 154) states that the documentary technique uses written material as a basic of research. It means that the sources of the data in this research are taken from the written materials.

In this research I divided the data into two types: primary and secondary data. The primary data are taken from the novel written by Rainbow Rowell entitled *Fangirl*. The data are all narrations, dialogues and statements in the novel that are related to fandom discourse as the main discussion in this research. The secondary

data are taken from some books that give me lot of information and facts about fandom. The secondary data are also supported by several additional electronic journals and articles related to the fandom discourse and the theory of representation.

3.3 Data Processing and Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the further step is data processing. This step begins with categorizing the data. To get the data related to the topic, close reading is an appropriate way to do. Close reading means reading the text more than once in order to get deep understanding. In the data processing, I categorize the data into two. The first category is all sentences, dialogues and narrations in the novel related to the fandom discourse. Then I divide it again into two. The first is narrations, dialogues and statements in the novel *Fangirl* that show pro to the fandom. The second is the one that is contra to it. The second category of the data are all information, facts and discourses about fandom in the real society by people, experts and any others researchers.

After categorizing the data, the next step is data analysis. In the first step of analysis, the data are analyzed using encoding/decoding in order to find the position of the characters in the novel and to interpret fandom discourses; either they belong to dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position or oppositional position. This step is used to answer the research question number one that is to find how the novel represents fandom discourse.

The next analysis is conducted to answer the research question number two. In order to find the significant discourse in the novel, I try to draw the relationship between the narrations, dialogues and statements in the novel that is related to the fandom discourse with the context of fandom in the United States in 2010s. Stuart Hall's theory about representation and constructionist approach are used in this step as the main tool. It helps to find the relationship between the narrative events in the novel that are related to the fandom discourse with the context of fandom in the real society.

After the second step is done, I try to find the critical position of the author in order to answer the research question number three. This step focuses on the position of the author to find her critical idea either she is pro or contra to the fandom. I try to break down this by relating the discourse of fandom with information about the author.

After solving all the problems, the last step to do is to sum up the discussion about the representation of fandom discourse in the novel in order to show the conclusion. The conclusion is aimed to make a better explanation for the readers. The scientific explanation and reason are needed when we analyze the data and make the conclusion of it. Therefore, it will be acceptable and understandable.
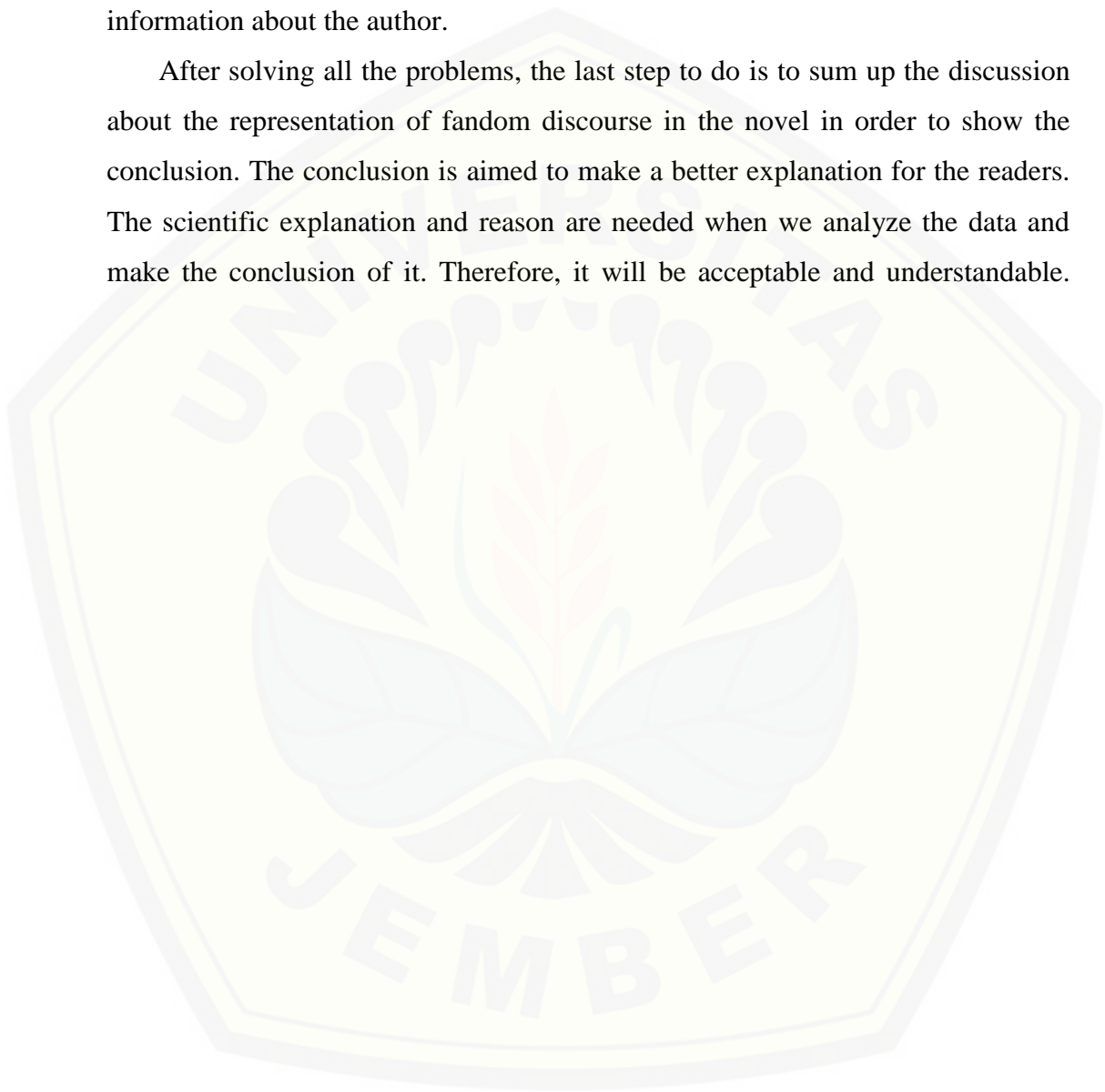
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the novel *Fangirl* written by Rainbow Rowell using the theory of representation; encoding decoding process by Stuart Hall, fandom phenomena is found as the discourse in the novel. In *Fangirl,* Rowell shows that the meaning of text is not only produced by one sided group or writer only but also the readers. The meaning is produced through the representation of its discourse which is portrayed in the novel. In order to show discourse of fandom in the novel, this research sums up the position of the characters in the novel into three groups based on Hall's theory. They are dominant hegemonic position, negotiated position and oppositional position.

For the dominant hegemonic position, there is only Cath who belongs to this position. Beside that in the same time Cath also belongs to the negotiated position. The supporting characters; Wren and Levi are on the negotiated position. On the other hand Reagan and Professor Piper belong to the oppositional position. In short, the novel *Fangirl* presents all positions of decoding process by Stuart Hall.

Fandom in the United States grows fast since the use of the internet in the early 2000s. It continuously becomes bigger and bigger until nowadays. Fans do not only become a passive consumer but also they become a producer. They make their own product based on the text they love. Their products such as fan art, fan fiction, fan video, stuffs that can earn money; T-shirt, poster, jacket, etc.

Rowell as the author of *Fangirl* gives portrayals that writing fan fiction can help the fan fiction author becomes a successful one with the original story and characters. On the other hand, she does not totally promote fan fiction. She still puts the original story as the product that is more worth-appreciating than fan fiction. Rowell puts back to its hierarchy that the position of sub culture is underneath the dominant culture.

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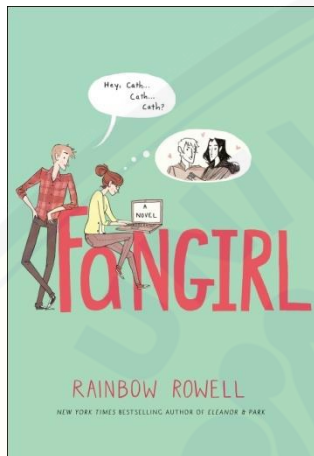
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APPENDIX

Synopsis of Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*

Fangirl is Rowell's second novel. This novel was published in 2013 and chosen by *New York Times* as the best young adult fiction of the year. *Fangirl* tells about Cath as the female main character who is a fan of fictional characters from *Simon Snow* novel series written by Gemma T. Leslie. Generally, Rowell describes Cath as a typical fan girl who buys the merchants and stuffs related to the novel she likes and writes fan fiction. She cannot differentiate her real life and delusional thoughts and prefers to communicate with her cyber friends who read her writings rather than her new college friends and her roommate in the dormitory.

Cath is a freshman at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, along with her identical twin Wren. But Cath is having a hard time adjusting to college. First, because Wren doesn't want to room with her, and second, because of her social anxiety disorder that makes her afraid to talk to anyone, attends social events, or even to eat at a dining hall. Cath spends her free for writing fan fiction for the novel she loves, Simon Snow. Simon Snow is a series of seven fantasy books written by English philologist Gemma T. Leslie. The books tell the story of Simon Snow, an 11-year-old orphan from Lancashire who is recruited to attend the Watford School of Magicks to become a magician. By writing fan fiction about Simon Snow, Cath has tens of thousands of passionate followers who read her fan fiction on the internet, Fanfixx.net.

Cath's first semester of college trains wreck as Cath witnesses her twin sister drink and party to excess. There are some matters worse, Cath's mother, who

abandoned the family when Cath and Wren were eight, tries to remake a relationship with the girls. Then, a boy pretends to be Cath's friend, Nick uses the story they write together as his own work for a college fiction writing class. Cath's life is back together to some extent, but she is faced with two challenges. She must finish her fan fiction novel about Simon Snow before the ending of the Gemma T. Leslie Snow series in May that time. She must also write a piece of fiction to turn in for her final project for a fiction writing class.