



**THE PORTRAYAL OF SEXISM EXPERIENCED BY
THE MAIN CHARACTER BETH HARMON IN *THE
QUEEN'S GAMBIT* (2020)**

A THESIS

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for
The Bachelor Degree Majoring in American Studies in English Department
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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer truthfully states that this thesis entitled The Portrayal of Sexism Experienced by The Main Character Beth Harmon in *The Queen's Gambit* (2020) is completed by the writer herself without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and any other diploma degree. The writer also confirms that she does not take any material from other publications except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, 19th October 2022



Syalfira Imani Adib

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Allah does not require of any soul more than what it can bear.”

– **Qur’an 2:286**

“Tough times never last, but tough people do.”

– **Robert H. Schuller**

*This thesis is sincerely dedicated to
Those I dearly love; my family and friends,
And to myself for always trying.*

APPROVAL

THE PORTRAYAL OF SEXISM EXPERIENCED BY THE MAIN CHARACTER BETH HARMON IN *THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT* (2020)

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The writer is aware that this thesis still lacks in certain areas. Therefore, any constructive criticism, correction, and suggestion would be very appreciated. Lastly, the writer hopes that this thesis may be useful and informative to those who wishes to read about sexism or other relevant subjects in general.

Semarang, 19th October 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Si' with a flourish underneath.

Syalfira Imani Adib

TABLE OF CONTENT

PRONOUNCEMENT	ii
MOTTO AND DEDICATION	iii
APPROVAL.....	iv
VALIDATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vi
ABSTRACT.....	x
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Research Problems	2
1.3 Objectives of the Study	2
1.4 Previous Studies	3
1.5 Scope of the Study	5
1.6 Writing Organization.....	6
CHAPTER 2	7
THEORY AND METHOD.....	7
2.1 Theoretical Framework	7
2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements	7
2.1.2 Extrinsic Elements	9
2.1.3 Cinematography	13
2.2 Method of Study	16
CHAPTER 3	18
ANALYSIS	18
3.1 Intrinsic Elements.....	18
3.1.1 Theme	18
3.1.2 Characters	20
3.1.3 Setting	31
3.1.4 Conflict	34
3.2 Extrinsic Element	38

3.2.1	Sexism Towards Beth	38
3.2.2	The Impact of Sexism on Beth	54
CHAPTER 4		58
CONCLUSION		58
REFERENCES.....		60

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the issue of sexism in *The Queen's Gambit* experienced by Elizabeth Harmon as a chess prodigy in America during the 1950s. The issue is analysed by applying the theory of sexism by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske. The purpose of this study is to examine the type of sexism that Beth receives during her time as a chess prodigy and how it affects her. Library research as well as narrative and sociological approach are used as the method to collect the data and to examine this thesis. For the result, the writer concludes that Beth experiences both types of sexism; Hostile and Benevolent, with Benevolent sexism as the most domineering type. The act of Hostile sexism can be found in episode one, meanwhile Benevolent sexism is present in episode two, three, four, and six. The sexist attitude that she receives also causes her to feel insecure about her skill and that leads her to excessive alcohol consumption.

Keyword: *Hostile Sexism, Benevolent Sexism, Chess Prodigy, Beth Harmon, The Queen's Gambit*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Since centuries ago, there has always been a difference between the way men and women function in the society. Men are positioned at the top with access to get education, have a career, pursue their dream, etc. On the other hand, women are expected to take care of the house and nothing else, which is unfair because women deserve to get education too and choose their life path. As a way to criticize the society, women came together and formed a movement called 'Feminism' in hopes to change the system that disadvantages them. They focus on advocating equality for both sexes. This movement covers a lot of issues regarding the unfair treatment that women are facing in the society, including sexism, which is an act of discrimination and stereotyping something based on one's sex.

This study is about *The Queen's Gambit* (2020), an American historical drama miniseries directed by Scott Frank, where the story revolves around the journey of an orphaned young girl named Elizabeth Harmon from Kentucky who plays chess and has a strong desire to be a Grandmaster. Beth discovers her remarkable talent in chess from playing with a janitor called Mr. Shaibel in her orphanage home. She successfully makes her name known by winning multiple tournaments. She even competes with a Russian World Champion, Vasily Borgov, at the end of the story.

Since this story is set in America during the 1950s, at that time there was barely any female chess players that could consistently win against the male players. The winning titles would almost always go to men because chess itself is mainly

dominated by the male players. Therefore, Beth's participation in the chess field unsurprisingly leads to many sexist remarks and attitude from the people throughout her journey. The comments are mainly focusing on her gender and questioning her ability, while deliberately ignoring her success. This gives the audience a little understanding of how sexism issue has been around since a long time ago, and yet women are still going through the same thing until now. For years, women have been trying to fight the damaged system in hope to be heard and further given the chance to create a more friendly society for them to live in.

Therefore, this thesis will be focused on analysing the sexism towards Beth Harmon in *The Queen's Gambit* by applying the theory of sexism by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske. Glick & Fiske categorized sexism into two types; Hostile and Benevolent. Hostile sexism is the negative attitudes towards women who do not follow traditional gender roles, meanwhile Benevolent presents it in a subtler way by attaching positive traits onto women. The writer hopes that this research could bring more awareness to people regarding sexism and why it is harmful.

1.2 Research Problems

Referring to the background of study explained above, the writer decided the problems that appear and are going to be examined in this research are as follows:

1. What type of sexism does Beth receive in *The Queen's Gambit*?
2. How does the sexist attitudes affect Beth?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The two primary objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the type of sexism that Beth receives in the show.
2. To find out the effects of sexism on Beth.

1.4 Previous Studies

Some other writers have conducted research regarding sexism in movies before. However, since the object of this study is a new series that was released in 2020, it is quite difficult to find a study about sexism using the same object as this research. Despite that, the writer managed to find some studies on different objects that focuses on sexism and uses the same theory by Glick and Fiske.

The first one is *Sexism in Children's Literature (The Tale of Peter Rabbit and The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck) by Beatrix Potter* written by Annisa Rahmaniya Afifah (2018) from the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. By applying the theory of ambivalent sexism proposed by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, the result found that the book promotes a traditional feminine stereotype on the female character that leads to sexist attitudes. The story portrays ambivalent sexist attitudes with more benevolent sexism than hostile sexism in it, by comparison 6:8. Moreover, the portrayal of hostile sexism in the story is seen through the dominant behaviour of male towards female character.

The second one is *Pengaruh Sexism dan Self-Esteem Terhadap Self Objectification Pada Mahasiswi* by Wachidatul Zulfiyah and Fathul Lubabin Nuqul (2019) from the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The study required 299 female college student aged 17-23 years from State Islamic

University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya as samples. The results shows that hostile sexism has a 2,7% effect, benevolent sexism has a 4,6% effect, while self-esteem has no effect on the prevalence of self-objectification at all. These findings suggest that sexism has a tendency to influence female students' physical attention, whereas self-esteem has no effect on a student's physical or self-objectification focus.

The third study is *Sexism in C.S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia* written by Heriska Ayu Prananing Tyas (2019) from Surabaya State University. The result of this study shows how the female characters in Narnia are portrayed to be less significant in the story. Their contribution during battle scenes is seen as not much compared to their male siblings. A character named Susan is also banned from coming back to Narnia because she started to like using lipstick and nylons, implying that women are unable to resist worldly temptation, and more reluctant to God's justification and sanctification compared to men.

The fourth study is written by Alfina Rahma Pridasari entitled *Pengaruh Seksisme Terhadap Peran Individu Dalam Masyarakat* (2021) from the State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya. The study suggests that the majority of people are aware of the term sexism and the various forms of sexist treatment that can be found in their environment. Most respondents usually offer explanation that the prejudice does not always reflect the reality, while others decide to stay quiet especially if the person who says it is higher than them in terms of position or age. However, despite knowing it and experienced sexism treatment first-hand, it does not have a major impact on their role or how they function in the society.

The last one is *The Neglected Hurt: The Effect of Hostile Sexism and Moral Outrage toward Myth of Rape* by Esa Laili Sindiana and Fathul Lubabin Nuqul (2020) from the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The study discusses about the level and the impact of hostile sexism and moral outrage on rape culture by using The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory as one of their theories. The result shows that hostile sexism, and moral outrage fall into the category of average level on rape culture. Hostile sexism contributes 38% on rape culture while moral outrage gives only 0,10%. To put it simply, hostile sexism has more impact that leads to rape culture.

The previous studies mentioned above are using quantitative method where they focus on analysing the issue of sexism and its impact towards female characters and women in real life by doing surveys and measuring it by numbers. This study, on the other hand, uses qualitative method where it focuses on a series about sexism specifically in the sport field and its impact towards a fictional character.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In order to set boundaries and prevent any irrelevant analysis that are too far from the main topic that the writer aims to discuss in this study, the writer will cover the analysis of theme, character, setting, and conflict as the intrinsic elements. As for the extrinsic elements, the study will be centred around sexist behaviour or comments towards Beth that appear in the series. Moreover, the discussion will also cover how the sexism that Beth receives affect her life.

1.6 Writing Organization

This research study as a whole is divided into four sections. Each chapter consists of discussion of topics according to the title, which is organized in the following order:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter focuses on explaining the background of the study, the research problems, the objectives of the study, the studies that have been conducted previously by other researchers as references to back up the study, the scope of the study, and the organization of the study.

Chapter 2: Theory and Method

In this section, the writer will explain the theories that are going to be used to analyse the object. The theories are divided into two; intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements in a literary work. The writer will be analysing theme, character, setting, conflict for the intrinsic. As for the extrinsic, the analysis focuses on the sexist comments that Beth received throughout her journey by using the theory of sexism.

Chapter 3: Analysis

This section will focus on analysing both the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the film using the theories that the writer had already mentioned before. Furthermore, this section will also consist of discussing the materials in depth in order to solve the research problems.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The overall analysis that has been discussed on the third chapter will be summarized in this section. The writer will restate the findings from the discussion in a shorter paragraph, in order to help the reader to get the right idea of the whole research. This section will also give suggestions regarding further studies related to the topic in this study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND METHOD

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic element is a part of narrative elements and it is a fundamental aspect that functions as a tool to help build a literary work. Abrams believes that narrative elements consist of the character, what the character does and says, and also the event in the story (1981:20). In this study, the writer is using objective approach to analyse the intrinsic elements which include theme, character, setting, and conflict.

2.1.1.1 Character

Abrams stated in his book entitled *A Glossary of Literary Terms* that character is a person in a narrative work that has moral and traits which can be seen through their sayings and actions (1981:20). Roger B. Henkle separated character into two kinds; major and minor characters. According to him, major characters are the most essential role in the story who appear the most and has their own complexity. On the other hand, minor characters have less exposure and their experience is less complex compared to the major characters (1965:60).

2.1.1.2 Setting

Setting is considered as one of the literary elements that help develop the plot alongside characters, theme, and other elements. According to Taylor, setting is separated into two kinds, physical setting and psychological setting (1981:69).

2.1.1.2.1 Physical Setting

Physical setting is used to give the audience an idea of the location (village, country, etc.) or time (historical time, future, etc.) where the event occurred (1981:69).

2.1.1.2.2 Psychological Setting

Psychological setting focuses more on the atmosphere that arises when an event occurred (suspense, joyful, etc) (1981:69).

2.1.1.3 Theme

Richard Taylor states that the idea of a story comes from the theme. It starts as an abstract concept, and then develops into a full story with the support of other essential elements such as character, setting, conflict, etc (1981:3).

2.1.1.4 Conflict

Robert Stanton believes that conflict is a dispute that involves the protagonist and the antagonist of the story. According to him, conflict can be categorized into two types which are internal and external conflict (1965:16).

2.1.1.4.1 Internal Conflict

Internal conflict comes from within the character. The struggle happens in the mind of the character regarding their desires or emotions (1965:16).

2.1.1.4.2 External Conflict

External conflict is the opposite of internal conflict. It is triggered by external forces that prevent the character from fulfilling their desire (1965:16).

2.1.2 Extrinsic Elements

According to Warren and Wellek, extrinsic aspects consist of individual subjectivity in which the author's belief or outlook may affect the literary work, psychological condition of the author and the reader, the author's condition (social, economic, and politic), their perspective of life, several works of arts, religious views, and so on (1949:65-66).

2.1.2.1 Sexism

Smuts believes that feminism put their focus on the issues of control: who is in control of the power, how they have it, how it is used, and the consequences that comes from it (1995:2). There are four major principles in feminism; women's liberation and right, women's position, women's role, and women's participation. Feminism covers many issues that are mainly targeting women as the victim such as discrimination, sexual objectification, gender inequality, patriarchy, domestic/sexual violence, and also sexism.

Doob states in his book entitled *Poverty, Racism, and Sexism: The Reality of Oppression in America* that sexism is the belief that there is a difference (real and imagined) between men and women that puts men on a superior level that claims them as the smarter, more capable, and more qualified sex to lead than women (2021:21). About when the term "sexism" itself started to emerged is still unclear, but people suppose that it started to spread since the

second-wave of feminism in the 1960s to 1980s as a way to raise awareness on the oppression of women. Sexism enforces an idea and role of what a man and a woman should be in the society. It also imposes certain societal narrative concerning traditional roles on men and women. Based on that view, women are considered to be less qualified to handle the realm that men hold.

2.1.2.2 Types of Sexism

Glick and Fiske proposed the theory of Sexism as a concept to give further explanation about the issue. They believe that sexism involves two sets of behaviour namely Hostile and Benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is a single factor, while Benevolent sexism shared three other components; paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexuality (1996:493). Both types of sexism share the same assumption that views women as the “weaker” sex. They aim to put women in a subordinate position in order to maintain male dominance, however they are expressed in a different way.

2.1.2.2.1 Hostile Sexism

Glick and Fiske stated that hostile sexism views women as incompetence and unfit to hold positions at economic, legal, and politic field. Moreover, hostile sexism views women as the weaker sex and have lesser social roles than men (1996:492). This type of sexism is expressed in a resentful way. Leaper and Robnett also mentioned in *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* that hostile sexism is the negative attitudes towards women who do not follow traditional gender roles. For instance, women who want to pursue sports are seen negatively by some people. This comes

from the sexist mindset that women cannot excel in certain fields simply because of their gender (2011:2641).

In *Ambivalent Sexism Revisited*, Glick and Fiske stated that people with hostile sexist attitudes tend to limit women's rights and choices, reduce women to objects rather than acknowledging them as human beings, make threatening or inappropriate comments about a person based on their gender or sex, and harass someone for defying gender norms (2011:533).

2.1.2.2.2 Benevolent Sexism

Benevolent sexism is defined as a set of sexist attitudes towards women based on stereotypes by attaching positive traits on to them. In contrast of the previous type, benevolent sexism tends to be more "socially accepted" since it portrays women as innocent, chaste, nurturing, and in need of protection. While benevolent sexism attaches positive traits to women, however, it creates a harmful idea that relates women to weakness and promotes male dominance. Examples of benevolent sexism includes assuming a person's profession or interest based on their gender, putting someone on a certain sphere based on their gender, and focusing on a person's appearance or other things rather than their attributes such as ability or intelligence (Glick & Fiske, 2011:491-492).

2.1.2.2.2.1 Paternalism

Sexism is viewed as a form of ambivalence, because it consists both dominance (dominative paternalism) and also protection (protective paternalism). Dominative paternalism views women as an incompetent creature, implying that

they need a male figure to lead the way. However, protective paternalism can also coexist with dominative paternalism because men depend on women for heterosexual reproduction. They see women through their roles as romantic partners and mothers. This creates a mindset that women need to be protected and loved. Protective paternalism can be seen in traditional gender roles where men are assigned to be the provider and the protector, while women are dependent on them to hold their status, socially and economically (Glick & Fiske, 2011:493).

2.1.2.2.2 Gender Differentiation

Like the dominative paternalism, competitive gender differences present the social acceptance of the male structure. Only men are seen as qualified to manage important social institutions. Men have a dyadic dependency on women (as mothers or romantic partners) and it leads to the belief that women have positive attributes to complete what men lack. They view women as a complement for them by staying at home while they are working outside (Glick & Fiske, 2011:493).

2.1.2.2.3 Heterosexuality

One of the most powerful factors of men's ambivalence regarding women is heterosexuality. Men's dyadic dependence on women builds an uncommon situation in which members of a more powerful group are reliant on members of a less strong group. They feel a strong desire and euphoric feelings when involved in an intimate connection. Males dislike the vulnerability that comes from it, which often can be seen from how women are depicted in literature as manipulative temptresses capable of weakening men. The idea that women utilize their sexual

attraction to gain power over men is highly associated with hostility towards women. Some men believe that sexual attraction to women is inextricably linked to a desire to have control over them (Glick & Fiske, 2011:493-494).

2.1.2.3 The Impact of Sexism on Women

The sexist attitudes that narrow women's space to fully function as the member of the society will naturally create impact towards them. Swim et al. argue that sexism causes psychological distress and affects women's psychological well-being such as low self-esteem, increased feeling of insecure, anger and anxiety, as well as depression. According to their study, the more a woman experience sexism, the angrier and depressive she gets (2001:50). The constant pressure from the society towards women who do not comply with the traditional role affects the way they live their life.

Furthermore, psychological distress is considered to be one of the major effects of sexism. When this happens, women would try to find something to release their stress. Zucker and Landry found in their research that sexism is related to drinking and smoking behaviour. They categorize excessive alcohol and nicotine use as a coping mechanism (2007:199). Women who suffer from psychological distress because of their experience with sexist attitudes turns to drinking alcohol and smoking excessively as a way to cope.

2.1.3 Cinematography

According to Blain Brown in his book entitled *Cinematography: Theory and Practice*, cinematography is the process of turning ideas, emotions, utterances,

tone, actions, and other kinds of non-verbal communication into visual terms (2012:2). The technique that is used in cinematography is called cinematic technique. Brown elaborated more on these techniques, and the lists are as follows:

2.1.3.1 The Shots

Brown stated in his book that if cinema is a language, shots functions as the vocabulary, and the way they're put together is the syntax. According to him, there are four fundamental ways of shooting a scene in filmmaking, they are wide shot (long shot), full shot, medium shot, and close-up (2012:17).

2.1.3.1.1 Wide Shot (Long Shot)

A wide shot is a kind of shot that cover the entire view within the scene. It allows the audience to get the idea of where the character is, how the place looks like, what objects are surrounding the character, and so on. The main purpose of this shot is to avoid any confusion from the audience (Brown, 2012:18).

2.1.3.1.2 Full Shot

Full shot allows the audience to be able to see the character from head to toe. Not only characters, full shot could also be applied to shot an object: a full shot of a ship covers all of the ship (Brown, 2012:20).

2.1.3.1.3 Medium Shot

Medium shot displays the character from the waist up with the purpose of letting the audience see closely what the character is doing. By showing a closer look, the audience could be able to see their expressions and be involved in their conversation without focusing on one particular character (Brown, 2012:20).

2.1.3.1.4 Close-up Shot

Close-up shot takes up most of the screen and it shows the audience an even closer look of the character's expression or a particular object in detailed. Brown stated that there are several types of close-ups shots in filmmaking, such as *the head and shoulders close-up* which shows character from the above their shirt pocket area, *the tight close-up* which leaves out some of the features like forehead and chin and just focus on some part of the face or *extreme close-up* which focus on one particular part of the body like the eyes (2012:21).

2.1.3.2 Lens Height

According to Brown, variations of lens height is helpful to add subtext to a scene. As a general rule, during a dialogue the shots are mostly focus on the eye level of the characters. However, many filmmakers think that using too much straight-on eye-level shot would be boring and it has psychological undertones, hence a variation is necessary to keep it interesting (2012:64).

2.1.3.2.1 High Angle

High angle shot is a technique in which the camera is placed above the eye height which makes it look like we are dominating the subject. It is used with the intention of showing the overall layout of the scene such as streets or buildings to the audience. Meanwhile, a super high angle is known as *a god's eye shot*, showing a distant, unconnected from the scene, a world view, philosophical point of view. (Brown, 2012:64).

2.1.3.2.2 Low Angle

A low-angle shot is useful to make a character seem sinister and forecasting. Shooting the scene from a low angle of a character approaching something, gives the audience the same sense of surprise or mystery as the character itself. The audience could also see the character's apprehension from this angle (Brown, 2012:64).

2.1.3.2.3 Dutch Angle

Dutch Angle shot is usually used by directors to capture the uneasiness atmosphere or to create an anxious and suspense feelings for the scene. This angle shot is mostly used in horror/mystery films (Brown, 2012:66).

2.2 Method of Study

2.3.1 Method of Research

The writer uses library research method to conduct this study. Mary W. George states that library research is a way of gathering data by comprehending information from books, journals, or expert opinions to answer the proposed problem (2008:6). Based on the definition above, the writer applies the method by watching and analysing the series itself, as well as gathering information from journals, books, and articles to support the analysis.

2.3.2 Method of Approach

For this research, the writer applies narrative approach to analyse the proposed research problems in *The Queen's Gambit* series. Cresswell stated that narrative approach is an approach that involves a set of stories from an individual

or a small group. The stories often show the individual's experience that exposes their identity (2012:502). This approach allows the writer to use the series itself as the data and analyse it by focusing on Beth's personal experience as a chess prodigy.

Moreover, sociological approach is also included in this research to further support the analysis. According to X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, sociological approach is used to examine a study by looking at the social, political, and economic context of the literary work (1979:1483). This approach is used to analyse *The Queen's Gambit* and explore the social issue found in the series which is sexism that Beth faces within the chess field. The theory of sexism by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske will also be used to identify what kind of sexism that Beth receives.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS

3.1 Intrinsic Elements

3.1.1 Theme

3.1.1.1 Talent and Ambition

The Queen's Gambit highlights the theme of Beth's talent and ambition as a chess player. Her remarkable talent can be seen in **Picture 3.1** where she plays against multiple chess club members of Duncan High School at the same time at age 7.



Picture 3.1
(Episode 1, 00:49:13)



Picture 3.2
(Episode 2, 00:27:25)

She then officially starts her career in chess by joining Kentucky State Championship and manages to take the crown from Harry Beltik as a State Champion. Her ambition is shown in **Picture 3.2**, which is shot using the head and shoulder close-up shot. Beth talks to Alma, her adoptive mother, about the tournament and how she would like to make some money for the entrance fee by getting a job. However, Alma does not like her plan, so Beth's last choice is to contact Mr. Shaibel for help. She writes and asks him to lend her 5 dollars. It shows how persistent she is to be a chess player.

3.1.1.2 Addiction

Another theme that can be seen in the series is addiction. Ever since Beth moves to Methuen Home, the caretaker would give each child “vitamins” once a day. The green pills, which is a tranquilizer, make Beth feel drowsy the first time she consumed it. Not only that, but it also causes Beth to hallucinate a chess match on her ceiling as seen in **Picture 3.3**.



Picture 3.3
(Episode 1, 00:20:04)



Picture 3.4
(Episode 2, 00:56:04)

The hallucination helps her to understand the game better. When the school stops giving the kids tranquilizer, Beth becomes agitated. Her friend Jolene tells her that she is having withdrawal. The evidence to support this analysis is shown in **Picture 3.4** where Beth is taking a tranquilizer in between her game against Harry Beltik. She does this to clear her mind in order to continue her moves.

3.1.1.3 Friendship

The series also highlights the theme of friendship. Throughout her life, Beth manages to build strong friendships with the people around her such as Mr. Shaibel the janitor, her friend Jolene in the orphanage home, her adoptive mother Alma, and her male chess friends Benny, Harry, the identical twin Mike and Matt, and also

Townes. Each of these friendships holds a different meaning for her, and they are very supportive of what she does.



Picture 3.5
(Episode 7, 00:53:08)



Picture 3.6
(Episode 6, 00:06:39)

The scene in **Picture 3.5** shows a glimpse of their friendship. Benny, Harry, Mike, Matt, and some other friends gather since 7 am to form the right strategies for Beth to defeat Borgov in her final match. They call and tell her what techniques she should play based on Borgov's first move. Meanwhile **Picture 3.6** shows Benny mentoring Beth before her tournament in Paris. This shows how supportive they are of Beth.

3.1.2 Characters

3.1.2.1 Major Character

1. Elizabeth Harmon

Beth is considered as a major character because she is the main protagonist that leads the story. The plot centres around her journey as a chess player, therefore she gets most of the screen time. Beth is a seventeen years old chess prodigy from Lexington, Kentucky. Her father neglects her since she was a child, while her mother commits suicide years later by purposefully crashing her car into another vehicle on the road. The whole incident causes a deep psychological trauma that

leads her to substance addiction which she develops at age 5 when she lives in the orphanage.



Picture 3.7
(Episode 1, 00:21:07)



Picture 3.8
(Episode 1, 00:22:48)

Beth finds her interest in chess when she sees Mr. Shaibel, a janitor at Methuen Home, playing chess in the basement. Her character is depicted as passionate and ambitious. Her passionate traits can be seen in several scenes, including the one in **Picture 3.7** which is taken using long shot, to capture the whole setting of the basement where Mr. Shaibel usually stays and to allow the audience to see Beth cleaning the eraser at the back before approaching him as she starts the conversation. The scene shows Beth trying to prove to Mr. Shaibel that she is serious about wanting to learn chess by pointing at chess pieces and explaining where it moves.

Beth	: “I’m not a stranger. I live here. I already know some of it from watching.”
Mr. Shaibel	: “Girls do not play chess.”
Beth	: “That one moves up and down, or back and forth all the way, if there’s space to move in. But that one can only go up. That tall one can go any way it wants.”
Mr. Shaibel	: “And this one?”
Beth	: “On the diagonals. One square diagonal, plus one square straight.”
Mr. Shaibel	: “Let’s play a game. I play White. Now or never.”

(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:20:48 – 00:21:51)

The conversation above shows that Beth still tries to understand the game on her own despite Mr. Shaibel refusing to teach her the techniques. At this point, Mr. Shaibel is amazed by her knowledge. Seeing her seriousness about chess, Mr. Shaibel finally invites her to play with him. In **Picture 3.8**, Beth shows her ambitious side by demanding Mr. Shaibel to explain the Scholar's Mate move once they started playing because she does not understand. Since the scene is using close-up shot, the audience can clearly see Beth's confusion and annoyance from her facial expression. Her furrowed eyebrows indicates that she has no idea what Mr. Shaibel just did on the board, and when she asks for an explanation, he refuses to tell her by saying "Not today."

2. William Shaibel

William Shaibel, known as Mr. Shaibel in the show, is a janitor who works at the Methuen Home where Beth lives at the time. He introduces chess to Beth and teaches her the techniques, though at the beginning he refuses to do so. He is also the one who introduces Beth to Mr. Ganz, a chess coach of Duncan high school team who invites Beth to play chess against the high school club members.



Picture 3.9
(Episode 1, 00:19:04)



Picture 3.10
(Episode 7, 00:15:32)

Mr. Shaibel's character seems closed off, cold, yet supportive of Beth. His introverted self chooses to spend most of his time in the basement where he rarely interacts with others. In **Picture 3.9**, which is a close-up shot, the audience can see Mr. Shaibel's annoyed expression as he tells Beth that he does not play with strangers. His closed off personality in this scene makes him look scary and unapproachable. He also indirectly tells her to leave him alone by saying that she should be in the chapel in a cold manner.

Mr. Shaibel : "What do you want, child? You should be in chapel."
Beth : "What's that game called?"
Mr. Shaibel : "You should be upstairs with the others."
Beth : "I don't wanna be with the others. I wanna know what that is you're playing."
Mr. Shaibel : "It's called chess."
Beth : "Will you teach me?"
Mr. Shaibel : "I don't play strangers."
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen's Gambit* 00:18:40 – 00:19:04)

Despite all that, deep down he actually cares about Beth. He does not like to be involved in a close relationship with other people, but he begins to see Beth as his own daughter as they spend more time together. He also keeps up with her achievement throughout the years, as seen in **Picture 3.10**, his wall is full of cut up newspapers that reports Beth's achievements. It indicates how genuinely proud he is of how far she has come. The scene let the audience to see his supportive side although they are not in contact for years.

3. Alma Wheatley

Another major character in the show is Alma Wheatley. Alma serves as the adoptive mother of Beth. Before adopting Beth, she felt lonely most of the time because she does not have a child and her husband works far away from home. When her husband left her, Alma feels even more lonely and heartbroken. However, she is determined to be a mother figure for her because she knows Beth is her responsibility.



Picture 3.11
(Episode 3, 00:41:56)



Picture 3.12
(Episode 2, 00:12:05)

Alma starts to be more supportive towards Beth's interest in chess and attends almost every tournament. Her supportive side can be seen in **Picture 3.11**, where she tries to comfort Beth after losing a game against Benny Watts. This is how the conversation goes:

Alma : “You’ll split the prize money. You’ll be co-champions. You will still get a trophy, albeit a smaller one. It happens all the time. I made some inquiries. The Open Championship is often shared.”
 Beth : “I didn’t see what he was doing.”
 Alma : “You can’t finesse everything all the time. Nobody can.”
 Beth : “You don’t know anything about chess.”
 Alma : “I know what it feels like to lose.”
 Beth : “Yeah, I bet you do.”
 Alma : “And now you do, too.”
 (Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:41:39 – 00:42:15)

Alma speaks to Beth in a calm, comforting way because she knows how upset Beth feels at the moment. The close-up shot is done to get a clear visual of their

expressions and to show the tension of their conversation. When Beth says “Yeah, I bet you do” as a response to what Alma says about how it feels to lose, the audience can see the shift in Alma’s face as she narrows her eyes for a split second. From that clip, the audience can conclude that Alma thinks what Beth says is offensive. Similarly in **Picture 3.12**, the shot is intended to let the audience see how heartbroken Alma feels at that moment through her furrowed eyebrows, tears, and shaky voice. The scene shows Alma’s responsible traits because she is willing to keep raising Beth on her own although she is not financially stable.

4. Benny Watts

Benjamin (Benny) Watts is a famous American chess prodigy who once held the title of the United States Champion. People consider him as the most talented player after Paul Morphy. His character is described as consultive, supportive, yet arrogant because of his intelligence in playing chess. He met Beth for the first time at the U.S Opening in Cincinnati. They were rivals at first, but later in the show they become closer and he also helps her with her upcoming matches.



Picture 3.13
(Episode 5, 00:29:19)



Picture 3.14
(Episode 5, 00:32:02)

In **Picture 3.13**, Benny rants to Beth about how they are currently the highest-rated players in the country yet the tournament does not look prestigious based on

the place that they chose to hold it in. The scene is taken using medium shot and low angle to capture the lecture hall with people sitting, smoking, and talking behind them. His arrogant personality can be seen in this scene and the dialogue between him and Beth.

Benny : “Who have you got up first?”
Beth : “Manfredi.”
Benny : “That shouldn’t take too long. Highest-rated players in the whole fucking country, and yet here we are at some second-rate university, playing on cheap plastic boards with cheap plastic pieces. If this were a golf or tennis tournament, we’d be surrounded by reporters as opposed to... whoever these people are. You should see where they play in the Soviet Union.”
Beth : “I’m planning on it.”
Benny : “You have to get past me first.”
Beth : “I’m planning on that, too.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:29:06 – 00:29:46)

Besides his arrogant trait, Benny has some good sides in him that can be seen in several scenes. The scene in **Picture 3.14** shows Benny’s supportive and consultive side. Him and Beth are talking over the phone about whether or not Beth should take the offer from an organization called Christian Crusade to fund her forthcoming competition in Russia. Benny encourages her to do so since they also funded him 2 years before. He advises Beth to study the game from the last Moscow Invitational Tournament, although she is still unsure about going there. Not only that, Benny also inspires and gives Beth a lot of valuable advices regarding chess, including the strategy for her last match against Vasily Borgov.

3.1.2.2 Minor Character

1. Harry Beltik

Harry's first appearance is in episode two as a player with the highest rank to play at the Kentucky State Championship Tournament. He held the title as a State Champion before Beth defeated him in their first match. Although they become closer as the story goes, his character is arrogant and stubborn at first.



Picture 3.15
(Episode 2, 00:57:47)



Picture 3.16
(Episode 7, 00:53:26)

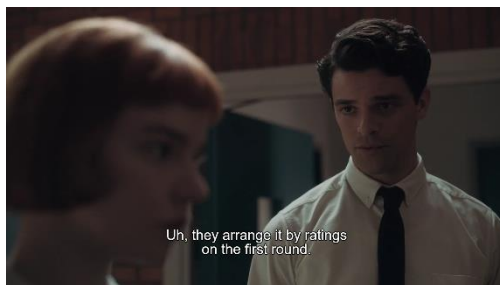
He taunts Beth by showing up late to grab a coffee first and yawns at her moves. When he loses to Beth, he calls her 'son of a bitch' which can be seen in **Picture 3.15**. His stubbornness can be seen at how he refuses to back down even though it's already checkmate. This is how the dialogue goes:

Harry : "Son of a bitch."
Beth : "I think that's it."
Harry : "No, I can get out of this."
Beth : "I don't think so. Maybe, if you'd gotten here on time."
Harry : (Keeps on concentrating on the board for a little while, then moves the chess piece.)
Beth : "It doesn't work. I don't have to use the queen."
Harry : "Move."
Beth : "I'll just cover it with the bishop and—"
Harry : "Move."
Beth : (Moves her chess piece) "Do you see it now? Or should we finish this on the board?"
Harry : "Son of a bitch."
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen's Gambit* 00:57:47 – 00:58:56)

Eventually he admits his loss and shakes her hand to congratulate her. Despite his arrogant personality, he is actually a caring, helpful, and supportive friend to Beth. He shows up at her door to help her study for her next match, but it does not end well. He leaves her house a few days later after realizing that chess does not interest him as much as it used to. However, he still checks up on Beth a few times because he is worried about her, knowing that she has a tranquilizer addiction. His helpful side can also be seen in **Picture 3.16** where he calls Beth in Moscow to teach her the strategies that she can use to defeat Borgov. The scene is using a medium close-up shot of Beth to show her expression. Her smile indicates that she feels happy about the call and how her friends are supporting her on the other side of the world.

2. D.L. Townes

Townes is a journalist and photographer working for *Chess Review*. He is also an associate editor at *Lexington Herald-Leader*. His job allows him to keep up with Beth's journey. They meet for the first time at the Kentucky State Championship where he participates as an underrated player. His character is depicted as sweet, nice, and charming.



Picture 3.17
(Episode 2, 00:34:57)



Picture 3.18
(Episode 3, 00:29:55)

It can be seen from his first interaction with Beth in **Picture 3.17** when she asks about the ranking system of the tournament. The scene is shot using close-up shot, specifically over-the-shoulder, in order for the audience to feel engage and to make it seem as if they are involved in the conversation.

Beth : “Are the matches played at random?”
Townes : “Oh, not at all. Uh, they arrange it by ratings on the first round. After that, winners play winners, and losers, losers.”
Beth : (Stares at him for a few seconds, then begins to leave)
Townes : “Good luck.”
Beth : “You, too.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:34:48 – 00:35:10)

From that interaction, he starts to pay more attention to Beth’s games. They grow even closer as the episode continues, starting off as casual friends. Although they seem to be interested towards each other based on several scenes in the series, Townes’ character is actually a gay man. The evidence that supports this can be seen in **Picture 3.18**. When Beth and Townes are talking and taking pictures in his room, a man named Roger suddenly barges in to get changed into a short and an unbuttoned shirt. He also reminds Townes that dinner is at nine. At that moment Beth finally takes the hint. The relationship between Townes and Beth stays as friends until the end of the show.

3. Jolene DeWitt

Jolene is a fellow orphan in Methuen Home. Her character is bold and straightforward which can be seen from the first time she appears in the show. The first time Beth arrives in the Methuen Home, Jolene was yelling and cussing as seen in **Picture 3.19**.



-[Jolene] Oh, fuck you, you cocksucker.
-[Fergussen] You can't yell like that.

Picture 3.19
(Episode 1, 00:05:58)



I'll give it to you.

Picture 3.20
(Episode 7, 00:22:01)

Although her character is not on frame, her name was mentioned in the script so the audience knows who is yelling. She is also the one who advises Beth that it is better to take the green pills at night. At the beginning she looks intimidating, but her character is actually supportive, generous, and wise. Beth sees her as an older sister and a best friend. Her generous and supportive personality can be seen in the scene in **Picture 3.20** which is taken using long shot.

Beth : “I should’t have bought the house.”
 Jolene : “Or all those dresses. Three thousand is a lot.”
 Beth : “It’s expensive to go to Moscow.”
 Jolene : “I’ll give it to you.”
 Beth : “What? No, you just said it’s a lot of money.”
 Jolene : “I have it and more. I’ve been saving.”
 Beth : “You need it for law school.”
 Jolene : “I do. And you’ll give it back when you win.”
 Beth : “What if I don’t win?”
 Jolene : “It’s still worth it. Or you could give me the black dress. Or the purple one. I like them both.”
 (Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:21:47 – 00:22:33)

Jolene is saving for law school, but she is willing to give her savings to fund Beth for her Moscow Tournament. It shows how generous she is as a person and how much she cares about Beth. The conversation continues with her telling Beth that she will always be there for her and vice versa, because that's what family does to each other. She believes that Beth would do well in her tournament.

3.1.3 Setting

3.1.3.1 Physical Setting

The physical setting of *The Queen's Gambit* is taken in various places. In the first few episodes, the main physical setting would be the Methuen Home in Mount Sterling, Kentucky since that is where Beth lives after her mother passed away. She spends years living in the building. She also finds her interest in chess during her time there.



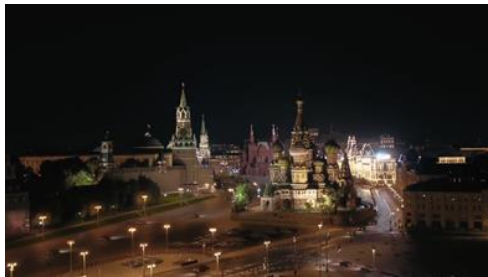
Picture 3.21
(Episode 1, 00:40:24)



Picture 3.22
(Episode 1, 00:56:13)

The whole scene in **Picture 3.21** is the part where Mr. Shaibel introduces Beth to Mr. Ganz, the coach of chess club in Duncan high school. Mr. Ganz then agrees to take Beth to play with the club members. That opportunity becomes her first official game with people other than Mr. Shaibel.

Furthermore, Beth's addiction to tranquilizer also starts in Methuen. The daily dose of green pills that she receives helps her to hallucinate a chess match in her head. She becomes addicted to the feeling because she consumes it every day. The scene in **Picture 3.22**, which is taken using full shot, shows Beth standing on a chair while holding a jar of green pills. She eats some of the pills and scoops it with her hand to put it in her pocket. Then, she decides to take all the jar from the office while the rest of the students and lecturers are in the classroom. However, the teachers and students come at the right time as they watch Beth starting to lose consciousness.



Picture 3.23
(Episode 7, 00:26:30)



Picture 3.24
(Episode 6, 00:19:35)

Besides Methuen Home, the director also uses various cities in which Beth's tournament takes place as the physical setting, such as Moscow and Paris as seen in **Picture 3.23** and **Picture 3.24**. Both of the scenes are taken using bird's eye shot to capture the whole view of the city and to let the audience catch up with Beth's timeline. The director actually shows the name of the city and the year in a big font to make it clear for the audience, but even without that, people can still identify where it is based on the buildings shown in the scenes.

3.1.3.2 Psychological Setting

From what the writer has observed, the overall psychological setting of the series is chaos and suspense. The chaos can be seen from the very first episode when Beth tries to steal a jar of tranquilizer from the office. She drops the jar as she loses her consciousness and the pills are scattered everywhere which can be seen in **Picture 3.25**.



Picture 3.25
(Episode 1, 00:56:21)



Picture 3.26
(Episode 6, 00:48:58)

Another scene that shows chaos can be seen in **Picture 3.26**. After losing against Borgov at the Paris Tournament, Beth comes back to her house in Lexington. She spends her money to buy the house from Mr. Wheatley and to buy new furniture. As a result, she does not have enough money left to go to Moscow for the next tournament. In dealing with the problem, Beth chooses to drown herself under the influence of alcohol to make her feel at peace for a little while.

However, her drunken self creates a mess around the house until she eventually passes out beside the couch. The scene in **Picture 3.26** is taken using a high angle shot as an attempt to show how vulnerable and powerless Beth feels at the moment. It also shows how messy her place is by looking at the table and the snacks on the floor.



Picture 3.27
(Episode 6, 00:32:15)



Picture 3.28
(Episode 5, 00:37:23)

Besides chaos, another psychological setting that the show tries to depict is suspense. The suspense atmosphere usually appears in scenes of a chess match between Beth and somebody. From the beginning of the series, the audience can feel the tension every time Beth plays chess with Mr. Shaibel. The atmosphere is almost always the same with different opponents such as Harry, Benny, Townes, and Borgov. To capture the suspense atmosphere, the director mostly uses close-up shot to show the character's facial expression. As seen in **Picture 3.27** and **Picture 3.28**, both Beth and Benny have furrowed eyebrows and tight lips to indicate that they are concentrating on the game.

3.1.4 Conflict

3.1.4.1 Internal Conflict

The internal conflict that Beth faces as the main protagonist character of *The Queen's Gambit* is her addiction to tranquilizers. Beth develops a tranquilizer

addiction at a very young age while living in Methuen Home. The school would give it to the students every day and forces them to consume it as a vitamin.



Picture 3.29
(Episode 1, 00:45:29)



Picture 3.30
(Episode 2, 00:56:04)

At first, Beth feels dizzy after taking one, but then she starts taking it at night and it makes her feel at ease. It also causes her to hallucinate a chess match on the ceiling. She uses it to learn how to play the game since Mr. Shaibel refuses to teach her. However, it becomes unhealthy later on. When the school stops giving tranquilizer pills to the students, Beth starts going through withdrawals. It was mentioned by Jolene as seen in **Picture 3.29**.

Beth : “Did Fergussen give you any green pills?”

Jolene : “Extra ones? No, honey, I wish he would. But they got the states after them for what they’ve been doing with those pills.”

Beth : “They’re still there. In the big jar.”

Jolene : “That a fact? I ain’t noticed. You’re having withdrawal symptoms?”

Beth : “I don’t know. What are those?”

Jolene : “Withdrawal, like... I don’t know, you getting edgy? Yeah, you are. You look around, there’s gonna be some jumpy orphans around here for the next few days.”

(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:45:06 – 00:45:52)

Beth keeps asking Jolene desperately if she has any extra pills until she eventually attempts to take it herself by breaking into the office and taking the pills from the jar. Throughout her journey of playing chess and participating in

tournaments, Beth keeps consuming tranquilizers to help her relax and focus during the game. It can be seen in several scenes throughout the series, one of them is in **Picture 3.30** which is taken using a close-up, over-the-shoulder shot to show Beth's panic expression in the mirror. Beth rushes to the bathroom to take the pills in between her game with Harry Beltik because he corners her and she cannot think straight on what to do next. After she takes the pill, she starts to visualize the chess board on the bathroom ceiling and then comes back in a calmer manner because she already knows what moves she should take to defeat him.

3.1.4.2 External Conflict

The external conflict of this series lies between Beth as the protagonist and her opponent in chess. Beth is an ambitious person and she surely has a remarkable talent. However, there are also times where she fails to dominate the chess board and ends up losing. The first time she loses is during the U.S Open in Las Vegas where she plays against Benny Watts. She explains to Alma how the game goes as seen in this conversation:

Beth : “It was brutal. It’s the kind of thing I did to other people. Kind of thing that Morphy did, and I missed it. I’d been thinking about doubled pawns.”

Alma : “You were thinking about winning. What did you do?”

Beth : “I needed a counterthreat. A move that would stop him in his tracks, but there wasn’t any. I spent half an hour studying the board and decided that Benny’s move was even sounder than I thought. I thought maybe I could trade my way out of it if he attacked too fast, but... he was careful. I had to retreat but he kept coming. I wanted to scream.”

(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:40:11 – 00:40:59)



Picture 3.31
(Episode 3, 00:39:53)



Picture 3.32
(Episode 7, 00:37:55)

The scene in **Picture 3.31**, which is taken using Dutch angle, allows the audience to feel the uneasiness that Beth is feeling during the game. Her eyebrows are slightly furrowed and she keeps her lips shut tight to indicate how panic she is as Benny keeps making unexpected moves. She eventually resigns to end the game because she has no other choice. The whole situation truly upsets her. They play against each other again at the US Championship in Ohio, but this time she manages to defeat him.

Despite being a popular, high-ranked chess prodigy, however, Benny is not Beth's biggest opponent in the series. Beth is much more threatened by Vasily Borgov, a reigning World Champion from Russia. His terrific skills and intimidating aura successfully make Beth feels insecure with her own skill. They play against each other for the first time at the Mexico Invitational Chess Tournament in which she loses. She keeps saying that Borgov makes her look like a fool and he messes with her confidence.

Benny : “Can you come to New York?”

Beth : “I don't know.”

Benny : “You can sleep in my living room, and you can leave for Paris from there.”

Beth : “That’s very nice of you, but I’m not even so sure I wanna go to Paris anymore.”
Benny : “What are you gonna do instead, huh? Get drunk?”
Beth : “Now that you mention it, yeah, sounds pretty good.”
Benny : “Beth...”
Beth : “Borgov made me look like a fool.”
Benny : “That’s because you weren’t ready.”
Beth : “I don’t know if I’m good enough.”
Benny : “You’re the best there is. You beat me.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:44:18 – 00:44:53)

Beth also tells Benny that she “went to pieces” with Borgov in Mexico City. Her loss causes her to feel uncertain on whether or not she wants to compete with him again in Paris and Moscow. From her conversation with Benny, Beth finally agrees to take him as her mentor to prepare for the tournament in Paris. However, she arrives late and has a terrible hangover on the day she plays with Borgov due to excessive drinking the night before. She struggles to focus on the game, so Borgov takes that as a chance to defeat her once again.

For the tournament in Russia, Beth only goes with an officer from the State Department. She plays against four Russian players and four players from other countries. On the night after Beth plays against Luchenko who was a World Champion, she accidentally eavesdrops him, Borgov, and another Russian player gathering to form strategies to beat her, which can be seen in **Picture 3.32**. They try to guess Beth’s possible moves for the next game and figure out how to decline them. However, she manages to beat both Luchenko and Borgov at the end.

3.2 Extrinsic Element

3.2.1 Sexism Towards Beth

3.2.1.1 Hostile Sexism as Seen in Episode 1: Openings

In the opening episode, the series introduces Beth's background as an orphan to build her character. They show the audience how hollow her life is because her parents left her at such a young age, making her childhood life different from other kids. Beth barely talks to people in the orphanage home, but she quickly becomes interested in chess when she sees Mr. Shaibel playing the game in the basement.



Picture 3.33
(Episode 1, 00:20:54)



Picture 3.34
(Episode 1, 00:22:58)

She eventually approaches the janitor and asks him to play chess with her as seen in **Picture 3.33**. In response to that, Mr. Shaibel answers coldly that girls do not play chess. In **Picture 3.34**, the director uses the head and shoulder close-up shot to emphasize how nonchalant he is about Beth's wishes which is apparent in his body language. He keeps his focus on the chess board while talking to the little girl, indicating that he does not take her seriously.

This is the first sexist behaviour that appears in the series. Based on Glick and Fiske's theory, Mr. Shaibel's comment aligns with the characteristic of **Hostile** sexism, which is limiting a person's right and choice to do something. In this case, he limits Beth's choice to learn chess by making a sexist remark that girls do not play chess. His comment can be interpreted as (1) girls are not allowed to play chess, or (2) girls are incapable of understanding chess; therefore, they do not play.

Either way, it is harmful to say so because he promotes the idea that only a certain gender can participate in the game, when in reality chess is a game that anyone can play regardless of their gender. From his comment, the audience can see that he believes in traditional views that specify which activity is appropriate for men and women. When they refuse to live up to those views, they will be seen negatively.

His comment also creates an assumption that Beth might not be able to understand the complexity of chess, not only because she is a little kid, but also because she is a girl. He does not think girls belong in the chess field, that is why he refuses to teach her how to play it. This behaviour is very unfair for Beth who genuinely wants to learn. What Mr. Shaibel said could possibly crush her interest in chess, and she would never be able to showcase her talent. However, as explained before, Beth has an ambitious personality. Her reaction to the comment can be seen from this conversation:

Mr. Shaibel : “Girls do not play chess.”
Beth : “That one moves up and down, or back and forth all the way, if there’s space to move in. But that one can only go up. That tall one can go any way it wants.”
Mr. Shaibel : “And this one?”
Beth : “On the diagonals. One square diagonal, plus one square straight.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:20:58 – 00:21:40)

Instead of feeling discouraged, Beth chooses to prove to Mr. Shaibel that as a girl she can understand chess too by explaining what each piece does on the board. She does not back down from his comment because she genuinely wants to learn chess.

3.2.1.2 Benevolent Sexism as Seen in Episode 2: Exchanges

As Beth grows older, she realizes that she wants to keep playing chess. She starts her career by joining the Kentucky State Championship. Her adoptive mother thinks the tournament is ridiculous, but Mr. Shaibel supports Beth by lending her the money for the registration fee. In this second episode, which is years later after Mr. Shaibel's sexist remark, Beth again faces a sexist attitude as she fills out the form to join the tournament. Matt, who is in charge of giving out the forms along with his twin Mike, offers Beth to join the beginner category because she is an unrated player. They try to prevent her from joining the main category because they do not think that she would win against the male players.



Picture 3.35
(Episode 2, 00:33:19)

Matt : “Are you sure you wanna do this?”
Beth : “I’m sure.”
Matt : “We don’t have a women’s section. I’ll put you in beginners.”
Beth : “I’m not a beginner.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:33:17 – 00:33:24)

Although Matt does not say a direct, vile comment about Beth, his behaviour towards her would still be categorized as **Benevolent** sexism. Glick and Fiske listed *Gender Differentiation* and *Paternalism* as two out of three components in Benevolent sexism. They argued that both of the aspects view women as incompetent creature that depends on men, excluding them from many social

settings because only men are considered as qualified. In this case, Matt assumes that Beth is incapable of competing against the male opponent in the main category. He tries to put her in a specific category that he thinks is suitable for Beth, when she is actually qualified to join a higher section which offers a higher prize if she wins. They are not sure about putting her in the Open section because they do not think she could win.

Moreover, his comment about not having a women section implies that Beth's skill is only comparable to other women. He believes that she would look weak if she plays against male players, and it most likely stems from the traditional views that he practices which often link women with weakness. He unconsciously put her in a position lower than men. Again, it aligns with *Paternalism* that views women as incompetent. He expects Beth to just agree with the idea that men should always dominate and be ahead of women.

To handle the unpleasant attitude, Beth reacts by asking Matt and Mike whether it would be against the rule for her to play in the main category despite not having a rank. This is how the conversation goes:

Beth : “What’s the prize for beginners?”
Mike : “Twenty.”
Beth : “What about the other section?”
Matt : “First prize in the Open is 100.”
Beth : “Is it against any rule for me to be in the Open?”
Mike : “Not exactly.”
Beth : “Put me in the Open.”
Mike : “There are three guys in there with ratings over 1800. And Beltik may show up. They will eat you alive.”
Beth : [Hands him the form and walks away]
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:33:32 – 00:33:50)

The dialogue shows that it turns out there would not be a problem for her to be in the Open section. This further proves that Matt and Mike are just trying to put Beth in a specific category because of her gender, which is an indication of Benevolent sexist behaviour. If Beth were to join the women's section, he would not be questioning her rank as a chess player because she would be competing against women. Beth is not buying this narrative. She does not understand why she has to compete in the beginner category when she knows very well that she is capable of handling the male opponents. Beth is confident with her skills and she has a strong ambition to dethrone Harry Beltik from his position as a State Champion. It is clearly seen by how she chooses to ignore what the twins are saying and insist to play in the Open section.

3.2.1.3 Benevolent Sexism as Seen in Episode 3: Doubled Pawns

In Episode 3, the sexism is still as strong as the scenes in the previous episodes. In this scene, Alma reads out an article from *Life* magazine about Beth during their dinner in a restaurant based on the interview that Beth did a few days before with the reporter of the magazine. The article talks about Beth's success as a young chess player. However, Beth finds the article disappointing due to some of the lines.



Picture 3.36
(Episode 3, 00:17:58)

- Alma : *““With some people, chess is a pastime. With others, it is a compulsion, even an addiction. And every now and then, a person comes along for whom it is a birth right. Now and then a small boy appears and dazzles us with his precocity, at what may be the world’s most difficult game. But what if that boy were a girl? A young, unsmiling girl, with brown eyes, red hair, and a dark blue dress? Into the male-dominated world of the nation’s top chess tournaments, strolls a teenage girl with bright, intense eyes from Fairfield High School in Lexington, Kentucky. She is quiet, well-mannered, and out for blood. Beth Harmon...”* [coughs]
Where was I? It’s all Greek all of the sudden.”
- Beth : “It’s okay, I’ve heard enough.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:16:48 – 00:17:44)

At the first glance it may look like a normal article talking about a rising young chess player, but if we look closely, the article is discrediting Beth a lot. Instead of mentioning her achievement or talking about her skill, the article chooses to focus more on Beth’s physical appearances, such as her eyes, hair, and even the dress she wore. Glick and Fiske stated in the theory of sexism that this behaviour falls into the category of **Benevolent** sexism. The line ‘But what if that boy were a girl?’ in contrast to the previous sentence about how common it is for a man to excel in chess, implies that it is seen as miraculous for a girl to match the skill of her male opponent, or even surpassing them.

Similar to the scene in Episode 2, *Paternalism* supports the Benevolent sexist mindset that girls are not as competent as men. The usage of ‘Boy’ in the article to describe the positive description already shows how different men and women are treated in the society. The article suggests how unusual it is for a woman to do extremely well in a field dominated by men. Some would argue that there are barely any girls in chess because they are not smart enough, but this is not factual. Most of the time, people just do not want to give women the chance to participate in the first place.

This issue is actually mentioned by the interviewer herself during her visit to interview Beth. She says that it must be intimidating for Beth as the only girl in the competition to compete with all those men. She assumes that way because she was not allowed to be competitive since she was a child. They feed her a narrative that certain things are meant to be for men only and they will always sit on a higher position. All those years of living with a sexist narrative in mind eventually causes her to adhere to the mindset which can be seen in the way she writes the article about Beth. The paragraph proceeds to show signs of Benevolent sexism by mentioning Beth’s physical features and her choice of clothing which has nothing to do with her success at all.

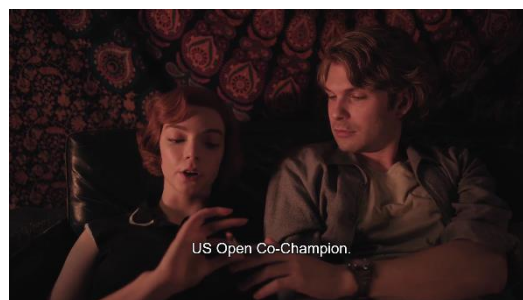
Beth : “It’s mostly about my being a girl.”
Alma : “Well, you are one.”
Beth : “It shouldn’t be that important. They didn’t print half the things I said. They didn’t tell about Mr. Shaibel, and they didn’t say anything about how I play the Sicillian.”
Alma : “Beth, dear, it makes you a celebrity.”
Beth : “Yeah, for being a girl.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:16:48 – 00:18:16)

It can be seen from the conversation with Alma that Beth feels upset about how the article turns out, because her appearance should be the last thing they talk about when she wins multiple chess tournaments. Giving compliment is one thing, but dominating the discussion with that topic to the point where the article did not include other important aspects regarding her achievement is problematic.

The audience can also clearly see from Beth's gesture in **Picture 3.36**, which is taken using over-the-shoulder shot, that it is bothering her how they choose to pay attention to her gender instead of her skills in chess. The beginning of the article focuses on the person's skills when the subject is supposedly a boy, but then it changes mostly to appearance after Beth's name was mentioned. This shows how people tend to take men more seriously because they are seen as qualified compared to how they treat women.

3.2.1.4 Benevolent Sexism as Seen in Episode 4: Middle Game

Another sexist scene that is found in the series is in Episode 4, which is when Beth starts taking Russian class at the junior college to prepare herself to face Borgov. During her class, she meets an unnamed guy who later on invites her to hang out at his place with a couple of other friends. The sexist comment comes out



Picture 3.37
(Episode 4, 00:01:28)

since the beginning of the conversation when the unnamed guy asks Beth about playing chess as they sit side to side on the couch.

The guy : “You’re the chess player.”
Beth : “That’s right.”
The guy : “Hm. US Women’s Champion?”
Beth : [Rolls eyes] “US Open Co-Champion.”
The guy : “Must be a trip.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:01:20 – 00:01:32)

Similar to the case in Episode 2, women are often perceived to be “too weak” to join sports, let alone compete with men. Although it seems like a simple question, however, making an assumption that Beth is competing in a competition that is made specifically for women is somehow discrediting her ability and success as a chess prodigy. The guy’s comment would be categorized as **Benevolent** sexism because it aligns with Glick and Fiske’s theory that Benevolent sexism puts people on a particular sphere according to their gender. *Paternalism* and *Gender Differentiation* again contributes to the belief that women are not hard-working and skilled enough to engage in a male-dominated activity. This ruins her chance to be taken seriously as a chess player.

The guy’s assumption would make sense if they were talking about sports that require physical strength as a determining factor to win the game – such as running or weightlifting – because men and women are different biologically, therefore it would not be fair to put them in the same category, but chess is cerebral. It only needs intelligence and the right strategy to dominate the board. This makes the assumption unnecessary because although Beth is a woman, it does not automatically mean she plays in the women category.

Furthermore, the guy's comment is considered as sexist because of the condescending undertone that shows how he underestimates Beth's skill as a chess player. His assumption makes it seem as if Beth's ability can only go as far as competing with other women, that is why he thinks that she must be playing in the women's championship. This assumption is based on nothing but Beth's gender. He does not know Beth enough to assume which level she's at. He only knows that chess is mostly dominated by men, so he put Beth in a section that he thinks is the most suitable for her based on her gender. Upon hearing the guy's question, Beth rolls her eyes to show how annoyed and tired she is of hearing these kinds of comment. She does not say anything back to offend him, but the audience can clearly see that she does not appreciate his assumption, as seen in **Picture 3.37** which is taken using the head and shoulder close-up to give a clear shot on Beth's irritated facial expressions.

3.2.1.5 Episode 5: Fork

Although sexism appears in all of the previous episodes, however, there is no single scene at all in Episode 5 that shows sexist attitude whether in the form of action or utterance. One of the reasons why sexism cease to exist in this episode is because half of the people who made the sexist remarks are no longer in the show, except for Matt and Mike, who quickly become friends with Beth since the fourth episode. The interviewer of *Life Magazine* and the unnamed guy from the Russian class only appear one time because their character serve merely as a supporting role. As for Mr. Shaibel, although his character is essential to the story, he only stays

until the second episode when Beth finally got adopted and moved out from Methuen Home.

Another reason why sexism seems to died down in this episode is because the series originally centred around Beth's journey to become a professional chess prodigy. In this specific episode, they are mainly focusing on building Beth and Benny's bond. There is a tense atmosphere between the two of them at the beginning of the tournament. Beth is confident that she would win against Benny this time after losing at the US Open, while Benny with his arrogant personality is positive that it will not happen. At the end of the game, Beth successfully beat him.

Although Benny has an arrogant personality, he accepts his defeat wholeheartedly. His loss does not turn him into a hateful person as a way to cover up the embarrassment of losing to a woman. Benny congratulates Beth instead, because he knows Beth's potential and skills. He even offers Beth a help when they both hang out at a bar after the tournament.



Picture 3.38
(Episode 5, 00:44:49)

Beth : “Borgov made me look like a fool.”
Benny : “That’s ‘cause you weren’t ready.”
Beth : “I don’t know if I’m good enough.”
Benny : “You’re the best there is. You beat me.”
Beth : “Okay, fine. I’ll come to New York.”
Benny : “Great. We’ll leave from here. I’ll drive us.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:44:45 – 00:45:08)

Benny offers Beth mentoring sessions before her tournament in Paris and Moscow. This shows how he genuinely sees Beth as a professional chess player. He never commented on her gender or her appearance, which would count as Benevolent sexism if he did. He treats her like any other chess players despite her being a woman. He even says that she is the best American player to play against Borgov. Benny would rather put his attention on Beth's talent during their mentoring session for the Paris and Moscow tournaments instead of questioning why a female player is surpassing him.

3.2.1.6 Benevolent Sexism as Seen in Episode 6: Adjournment

This episode opens with Beth arriving at Benny's place in New York. The audience can see how they develop their friendship throughout the mentoring session before Beth takes off to Paris. Although it seems like the main focus of this episode is about Beth's tournament in Paris, however, there is a scene that falls under the category of sexism. The sexist comment appears during a press conference that Beth, Borgov, and other chess players attend before the international tournament.



Picture 3.39
(Episode 6, 00:20:56)

Reporter : “Miss Harmon, what do you say to those in the Chess Federation who accuses you of being too glamorous to be a serious chess player?”
Beth : “I would say that it’s much easier to play chess without the burden of an Adam’s apple.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:20:42 – 00:20:56)

This comment is similar to the case in Episode 3 when *Life Magazine* made an article about Beth. Again, these people choose to criticize Beth’s lifestyle and her choice of clothing as if that has anything to do with being a serious chess player at all. Her lifestyle should not be the factor to determine her position in chess. This comment aligns with the characteristic of **Benevolent** sexism where The Chess Federation – or perhaps the press too – use *Paternalism* as the basis of the mindset that if a woman cares too much about their appearance, they must not have enough time to master other things. The Chess Federation implies that Beth is not competent enough to be considered as a chess player based on her glamorous lifestyle. There is no correlation between the two, and it is also not fair because Beth has tons of achievement following her name.

Her achievements should be the only thing that they consider when talking about being a serious chess player. The Chess Federation never say anything about Benny’s underground apartment, but Beth’s personal choice somehow seems to bother them a lot that they choose to focus on that instead of her ability to play chess. This shows how women have to work way harder than men to be taken seriously and to prove that they are worthy of such title.

To respond to that comment, Beth answers sarcastically that it is actually easier for her as a woman to play chess without an Adam’s apple – which is a visible physical characteristic of a male – because she does not have to deal with the

societal standards that expect men to always lead. This refers to the traditional view in the society that perceives men as strong, competent individuals who are meant to dominate almost every aspect of life. If they fail to live up to that expectation, they would be shamed for it. Due to this standard, the men would consider it as a huge embarrassment if a woman exceeds them.

By making that statement, Beth is trying to say that if they think “glamorous” lifestyle reduces someone’s capability in playing chess, then men must be suffering from some other kind of detriment as an explanation of Beth’s accomplishment all these years. Surely having a glamorous lifestyle has nothing to do with her skill, because she still manages to win multiple chess tournaments. This scene is taken using medium close-up shot as seen in **Picture 3.39**, to highlight Beth’s facial expressions as a way to show how the question does not affect her at all.

3.2.1.7 Episode 7: End Game

The last episode of this series does not have any scenes that shows signs of sexism. It centres around Beth’s tournament in Moscow where she plays against four Russians including Borgov, and four other players from different countries. During her time in Moscow, Beth manages to make peace with her addiction to tranquilizer and challenges herself to play against Borgov – her biggest rival – without consuming any pills.

Before meeting Borgov at the final match, Beth plays against several players, including the legendary World Champion Luchenko. Luchenko is playing the white pieces, allowing him to make the first move. Although he has advantage

over Beth at the beginning of the game, he still loses to her in the end. Luchenko resigns from the game with relief. He praises Beth by saying, “*You are a marvel, my dear. I may have just played the best chess player of my life.*” Luchenko does not shake Beth’s hand like most players do when the game is over, but he bows as a sign of deep respect for Beth. Through his gesture, the audience can see how he treats her like they are equal, although there is a huge gap between their age and experience in the chess world. While other characters such as Matt, Mike, or the interviewer of the *Life Magazine* suggest that men sit on a higher level than women,



Picture 3.40
(Episode 7, 01:00:11)

Luchenko on the other hand is willing to acknowledge Beth’s superiority at that moment without thinking of his loss as an embarrassment for his career.

The same thing happens with Borgov. His character seems to put so much pressure on Beth. He keeps his face stern most of the time, creating an intimidating aura around his personality. However, when Beth successfully corners him at their final match before he resigns, Borgov tells Beth that this is her game because he knows she is stronger than him at that moment. He accepts the defeat by taking Beth’s hand and pulling her into a hug. Luchenko and Borgov’s gesture towards Beth when they lose shows a high level of maturity and understanding that anyone can win as long as they know how to dominate the board. They understand that

chess has nothing to do with one's gender, that is why they accept their loss wholeheartedly. They do not see Beth from her appearance or her lifestyle like how the Chess Federation did, instead they see her as a professional chess player with talent and ambition.

3.2.2 The Impact of Sexism on Beth

3.2.2.1 Insecurity

The storyline of *The Queen's Gambit* depicts how Beth deals with sexism for years since she was a little girl until she becomes an adult. Her experience with both Hostile and Benevolent sexism eventually affects her life. In a scene from episode 5, the series shows Beth and Benny talking in a pub after their tournament ended. During the conversation, Beth admits that she is not sure whether she wants to continue the tournament in Paris because she does not think that she is good enough to compete there.



Picture 3.41
(Episode 5, 00:44:48)

Benny : “You can sleep in my living room, and you can leave for Paris from there.”

Beth : “That’s very nice of you, but I’m not even so sure I wanna go to Paris anymore.”

Benny : “What are you gonna do instead, huh? Get drunk?”

Beth : “Now that you mention it, yeah, sounds pretty good.”

Benny : “Beth...”

Beth : “Borgov made me look like a fool.”

Benny : “That’s ‘cause you weren’t ready.”

Beth : “I don’t even know if I’m good enough.”
Benny : “You’re the best there is. You beat me.”
(Frank, 2020, *The Queen’s Gambit* 00:44:25 – 00:44:53)

The conversation above shows how Beth feels insecure about her own ability in playing chess. She may have an ambitious personality, however being the only woman at that time who plays in multiple tournaments full of male players and constantly receiving sexist attitudes surely affects her psychological well-being. Women are often seen negatively for entering interest or field that are considered masculine. The first time Beth tries to learn how to play chess, she receives a sexist comment telling her that she does not belong in the chess field because of her gender. When Beth finally starts her career, she tries to prove people that she is as talented as other male players. She works harder so she can get the recognition that she deserves.

However, although Beth is naturally skilled, there are times where she messes up on the board and lose. This is when the insecurity kicks in. The sexist attitudes that she receives over and over leads her to feel like a failure. She questions her own skill when she loses in a match. From **Picture 3.41** and the conversation above, the audience can see that Beth is hesitant about going to Paris. Her insecurity is triggered by the thought of having to play against Borgov again, because he defeated her in Mexico City. She is not sure whether her skill is comparable to Borgov who has been in the chess world long before she does. Beth is scared of losing again and feeling even more insecure about herself.

3.2.2.2 Excessive Alcohol Consumption

Aside from being insecure of her own skill because of sexism, Beth also turns to drinking alcohol excessively as a coping mechanism. After Alma passed away and Beth lost to Borgov again for the second time during the Paris tournament, she comes back home feeling completely lost and lonely.



Picture 3.42
(Episode 6, 00:48:38)

For the final match at the Paris tournament, Beth once again has to play against her number one rival, Borgov. Beth struggles to keep her focus during the game because she keeps getting flashbacks from her childhood memory. She also gets anxious about moving the wrong chess piece because Borgov corners her everytime. At the end, she eventually loses the game.

Her loss this time truly affects her. She gets even more insecure about her skill because she fails to prove to the people who underestimate her before that she deserves the acknowledgement for her amazing talent at such a young age. When she comes home to an empty house, she feels as though she does not have anyone anymore to give her support. To deal with the insecurity and sadness, Beth decides that it would be better to switch her mind off for a while by drinking alcohol. She drinks a couple bottles until she loses consciousness. The scene in **Picture 3.42** shows Beth dragging a trash can full of alcohol bottles that she drinks in such a short amount of time.

This shows how the insecurity that comes from the sexist attitudes that she receives all those times leads to unhealthy drinking behaviour. Beth uses excessive alcohol consumption as a way to cope from feeling insecure and ashamed at how the Paris tournament turns out. When it gets too much to handle, she turns to alcohol as the only thing that would give her mind a little “rest” from the negativity surrounding her life.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Beth does experience both type of sexism in *The Queen's Gambit* which are Hostile and Benevolent sexism. The sexist attitudes found in the show align with the characteristics of sexism that Glick and Fiske mentioned in their theory. However, Benevolent sexism seems to be the most domineering type in this study because Benevolent sexism seems to be more socially acceptable due to the positive traits that it attaches onto women and its subtle expression, making it quite hard to notice that the act is done to keep Beth in a lower position than the male chess players. The act of sexism can be seen through how the male characters try to maintain male dominance by discrediting Beth's achievements and excluding her from the activity.

The act of Hostile sexism can be seen in episode one, meanwhile Benevolent sexism is found in the second, third, fourth, and sixth episode with *Paternalism* and *Gender Differentiation* as the subcomponents that support the act of sexism itself. The fifth and the seventh episode does not have any sexism scenes because they focus more on showing Beth's relationship with other characters and her effort to become a Grandmaster.

The constant sexist attitude that Beth receives over the years eventually impacts her life in some way. Although Beth is a very ambitious person, however, sexism leads her to feel insecure and doubtful about her own ability in playing chess. She admits to Benny that she is not sure about going to the Paris tournament because she thinks she is not good enough to play there. Aside from that, sexism

also leads her to have unhealthy drinking behaviour. When she loses again at the Paris tournament, her insecurity arises and she ends up drinking alcohol excessively to run away from the pressure that the chess community put on her. Although it is unfortunate that she has to deal with unfairness and stereotypical views from people, in the end Beth manages to turn the sexist remarks into a motivation to further showcase her talent, to improve her skill, and to achieve her dream.

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