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The Gender Inequality Issues Depicted in "The Queen's Gambit (2020) Serial Movie by Scott Frank

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Abstrak

Diskriminasi gender mengacu pada perlakuan tidak adil terhadap individu berdasarkan jenis kelamin dan sering terjadi dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan sosial, termasuk tempat kerja, pendidikan, dan media. Film *The Queen's Gambit* menggambarkan perjalanan seorang pecatur perempuan, Beth Harmon, yang menghadapi berbagai tantangan di dunia yang didominasi laki-laki. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi tema diskriminasi gender yang digambarkan dalam film tersebut dan menganalisis bagaimana representasi Beth Harmon mencerminkan pengalaman nyata perempuan di bidang yang secara tradisional didominasi laki-laki. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis kritis, studi ini mengidentifikasi dan mengevaluasi berbagai bentuk diskriminasi yang dihadapi Beth, baik struktural maupun interpersonal, serta dampaknya terhadap pengembangan karakter dan narasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Beth Harmon berhasil mengatasi hambatan gender untuk mencapai kesuksesan, film ini tetap mencerminkan dan menyoroti tantangan sistemik yang dihadapi perempuan di bidang kompetitif. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman dinamika gender dalam konteks media populer dan menawarkan wawasan tentang bagaimana representasi gender dalam film dapat memengaruhi persepsi publik dan norma sosial.

Kata Kunci: *Diskriminasi Gender, The Queen's Gambit, Representasi Gender, Film, Catur, Norma Sosial*

Abstract

Gender discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of individuals based on their sex and often occurs in various aspects of social life, including the workplace, education, and media. The film **The Queen's Gambit** portrays the journey of a female chess player, Beth Harmon, who faces numerous challenges in a male-dominated world. This article explores the theme of gender discrimination depicted in the film and analyzes how the representation of Beth Harmon reflects the real-life experiences of women in traditionally male-dominated fields. Using a critical analysis approach, this study identifies and evaluates the different forms of discrimination faced by Beth, both structural and interpersonal, and their impact on character development and narrative. Findings indicate that while Beth Harmon manages to overcome gender barriers to achieve success, the film still reflects and highlights the systemic challenges faced by women in competitive fields. This article contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in the context of popular media and offers insights into how gender representation in film can influence public perceptions and social norms.

Keywords: *Gender Discrimination, The Queen's Gambit, Gender Representation, Film, Chess, Social Norms*

INTRODUCTION

The representation of women in media has long constituted a focal point in both feminist theory and media studies, serving as a critical lens through which to interrogate the cultural production and reproduction of gendered power relations. Scholarly investigations have consistently demonstrated that women are frequently marginalized, rendered invisible, or confined to reductive stereotypes in film and television. Such portrayals function not only as reflections of prevailing societal norms but also as mechanisms that sustain and legitimize structural gender inequalities in both private and public spheres. In this context, it becomes essential to examine cultural texts that challenge, resist, or reconfigure these representational paradigms. One such text is *The Queen's Gambit* (2020), a Netflix miniseries that foregrounds issues of gender discrimination through the narrative of a female protagonist navigating a historically male-dominated domain.

Based on Walter Tevis's 1983 novel, *The Queen's Gambit* is set against the sociopolitical backdrop of the 1960s—a period marked by rigid gender binaries and limited institutional access for women. The series chronicles the life of Beth Harmon, a chess prodigy whose rise to international prominence unfolds amidst entrenched cultural expectations regarding femininity, intellect, and autonomy. Through its detailed character development and period-specific *mise-en-scène*, the series engages with broader discourses on gender, agency, and resistance. By depicting Beth's persistent negotiation of the structural and

symbolic barriers inherent to the male-dominated world of competitive chess, *The Queen's Gambit* offers a compelling critique of patriarchal norms and the gendered allocation of intellectual authority.

The cultural significance of *The Queen's Gambit* extends beyond its narrative achievements. Harmon's characterization subverts conventional tropes associated with female protagonists in popular media. Unlike many female characters whose arcs are contingent upon romantic or domestic fulfillment, Beth is defined primarily by her intellectual ambition, psychological complexity, and autonomy. Her defiance of socially sanctioned roles serves as an emblem of resistance against the marginalization of women in elite, male-centric spaces, thereby opening a discursive space to interrogate the gendered boundaries of genius, power, and recognition.

This study employs Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory as an analytical framework to explore the ways in which *The Queen's Gambit* constructs and communicates gendered meaning through visual and narrative signs. By examining key semiotic elements—such as costume design, spatial configurations, body language, and dialogue—this research elucidates how the series both reproduces and challenges dominant gender ideologies. The semiotic approach allows for a nuanced reading of implicit and explicit forms of gender discrimination within the series, revealing how symbolic structures contribute to the normalization of gendered hierarchies.

Furthermore, although the narrative is situated in a historical moment, the issues it raises concerning gender inequality and institutional exclusion remain salient in contemporary contexts. As such, *The Queen's Gambit* functions as both a period piece and a critical commentary on the persistence of gendered power asymmetries in modern society. By tracing Beth's trajectory through a socio-symbolic landscape fraught with gendered constraints, the series compels audiences to reconsider the enduring nature of these challenges and to reflect on the cultural narratives that continue to shape our understanding of gender and capability.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, with semiotic analysis serving as the central analytical approach to explore the representation of gender discrimination in *The Queen's Gambit* (2020). Qualitative research is particularly suitable for analyzing cultural texts, as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of meaning, symbolism, and the socio-cultural implications embedded in media narratives. Through a textual and visual analysis of

the series, the study investigates how gendered meanings are constructed, communicated, and contested within the framework of a male-dominated field.

The semiotic framework employed in this study is grounded in Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic model of the sign, which distinguishes between the signifier (the form or medium through which meaning is conveyed) and the signified (the concept or idea that the sign represents). This theory enables the researcher to decode the relationships between linguistic and visual signs and the socio-cultural ideologies they signify. By applying this model, the analysis seeks to uncover how specific signs within the series function to reinforce or challenge prevailing gender norms and discriminatory structures.

Data for this research are collected through meticulous observation and documentation of selected scenes from *The Queen's Gambit*. Episodes and scenes are chosen purposively based on their thematic relevance to gender representation, with particular attention given to moments that depict power dynamics, resistance, and the social positioning of the female protagonist, Beth Harmon. These scenes are examined for both denotative elements (literal meanings) and connotative elements (implied or culturally constructed meanings), focusing on *mise-en-scène* (e.g., costume, color schemes, spatial arrangement), character interaction, dialogue, and visual framing.

The analytical process involves identifying recurring patterns and symbolic oppositions (e.g., male/female, authority/submission, rational/emotional) that structure the narrative and visual representation of gender. The aim is to reveal how these signs construct a semiotic system that either reinforces or interrogates dominant gender ideologies. In particular, the study analyzes how Beth Harmon's character navigates institutional and interpersonal forms of marginalization, stereotyping, and subordination, and how her portrayal serves as a critique or reflection of the broader socio-cultural attitudes toward women in intellectual and competitive domains.

This approach also allows for the identification of implicit or latent messages that may not be immediately apparent but contribute significantly to the discourse on gender. These include visual metaphors, symbolic motifs, and representational absences that subtly encode assumptions about femininity, agency, and capability. By interpreting such signs, the research provides a holistic understanding of how gender dynamics are portrayed not only through direct representation but also through nuanced and ideologically charged narrative structures.

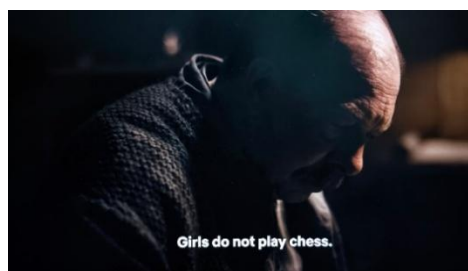
In sum, the semiotic methodology employed in this study offers a rigorous and interpretive lens through which to examine the ways in which *The Queen's Gambit*

negotiates questions of gender, power, and representation. It provides critical insight into the media's role in both reflecting and shaping societal attitudes, particularly in relation to women's roles in historically exclusionary spaces. Through this framework, the study contributes to broader academic conversations on media representation, gender discourse, and cultural semiotics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *The Queen's Gambit* reveals multiple instances of gender discrimination experienced by Beth Harmon. These include:

Scene 1 [00:05:30 - Episode 1]



In this scene Beth asks Mr. Shaibel to teach her chess, but he dismisses her saying, 'Girls do not play chess.' This reflects the stereotype that women are not fit for intellectual pursuits. Even though women also have right for play chess and also not there is rule special in game chess that woman no may play chess.

Scene 2 [00:20:10 - Episode 2]



Beth's mother undermines her chess ambition by saying, 'The only girls your age who work are colored.' This scene highlights racial and gender bias simultaneously. Injustice For a woman this already happened a long time ago. Women Cant choose whatever they are want to do,

Scene 3 [00:33:15 - Episode 2]



The tournament administrator doubts Beth's abilities, stating, 'We don't have a women's section.' This marginalization excludes women from competitive participation. This scene shows a woman who is considered not worthy for play chess, because chess is a complicated game.

Scene 4 [00:12:40 - Episode 3]



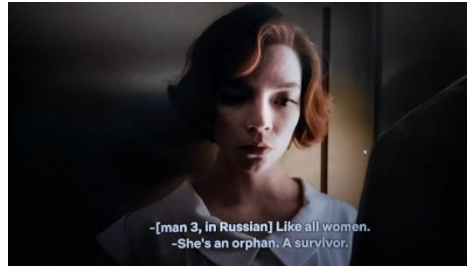
Benny Watts condescendingly compares Beth to a male prodigy, saying, 'Reshevsky was doing this younger than you, little girl.' This reflects how women's achievements are constantly belittled and show that a man is always more superior than women even at the time he is more young.

Scene 5 [00:25:50 - Episode 3]



During an interview, Beth complains, 'They didn't write about my game, only that I'm a girl.' The media emphasizes her gender over her skills and content in magazine only emphasizes his name as only "female" chess players. Even Beth's mother also doesn't care about that. Mother Beth only cares about what Beth became celebrities.

Scene 6 [00:15:45 - Episode 4]



A Russian player mocks Beth in the elevator, saying, 'She doesn't always watch her back. Like all women. this considered ugly because she is like other women, as if mocking her that it is easy to defeat her just because she is a woman. This reinforces gender-based assumptions of weakness.

Scene 7 [00:41:30 - Episode 7]



Commentators dismiss Beth's abilities, stating, 'The only unusual thing about her is her sex.' This trivializes her success based solely on her gender. In this scenes we can see woman only seen because she is women, not from achievements obtained.

Despite these challenges, Beth's resilience and determination allow her to break barriers and challenge gender norms. Her success serves as a critique of the systemic biases that limit women's opportunities in male-dominated fields.

CONCLUSION

The Queen's Gambit offers a compelling exploration of the systemic challenges faced by women in male-dominated environments, as illustrated through the personal and professional journey of the protagonist, Beth Harmon. The series effectively highlights multiple dimensions of gender discrimination—ranging from marginalization and stereotyping to subtle forms of subordination—while simultaneously presenting a narrative of resistance and resilience. Beth's character serves as a powerful counter-narrative to traditional gender roles, demonstrating that exceptional talent and perseverance can transcend socially constructed boundaries.

Through its portrayal of Beth's rise in the competitive world of chess, a discipline long perceived as the domain of men, the series challenges prevailing gender norms and disrupts assumptions regarding female capability in logic-based, intellectual fields. Beth becomes a symbol of empowerment, defying societal expectations not only through her skill but also through her determination to remain true to herself despite external pressures. Her journey illustrates that competence, intelligence, and success are not inherently gendered attributes, and that structures built to maintain inequality can be questioned and overcome.

This study contributes meaningfully to ongoing conversations about gender representation in media. It underscores the crucial role that television and film play in both reflecting and shaping societal perceptions of gender. By centering a female protagonist in a traditionally male arena, *The Queen's Gambit* advances the discourse on gender equity and offers a framework for examining how media can both perpetuate and dismantle harmful stereotypes.

Future research may benefit from analyzing similar representations in other media texts, especially those set in male-dominated fields such as science, technology, politics, or sports. Additionally, incorporating an intersectional lens—considering how race, class, and sexuality interact with gender—could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different identities experience and resist systemic oppression in mediated narratives. Such studies are essential in fostering a more inclusive and equitable media landscape.

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