

Step 1

Name of the Character: Beth Harmon

Name of the franchise: The Queen's Gambit

Image:



Step 2

Case Vignette:

Beth Harmon is a 20-year-old female who comes from Winchester, Kentucky. She is a professional chess player. Her biological parents got divorced due to the mother's uncertain mental disorder. After reaching out for help to her ex-husband and getting rejected, Beth's mother chose to commit suicide and success by crashing her car intentionally with Beth inside it when Beth was 9 years old. Beth was then sent to Methuen Home: Orphanage for Girls where she grew up to 13 years old and was adopted by the Wheatley family. During her year in the orphanage, she was introduced to a type of "vitamin" that the organization gave to the girls there every day. Beth would secretly hoard them to a certain amount and eat the "vitamin" all at once

before bed so she could see the hallucination of chess games which she had fallen in love with, creating a dependence on the substance. We later learn that the “vitamin” substance that the orphanage gave them is a type of tranquillizer called xanzolam (a made-up drug created for the series). In addition, after Beth was introduced to alcohol when she was still underage by her adoptive mother, Alma Wheatley, she became dependent on the substance as well. This habit of drinking and taking “the pills” has slowly become part of her life, forming a heavy addiction. It was depicted that whenever she was down or upset in life (mostly because of her chess game since she is gradually having no life other than addiction and chess games), she would drink a bottle of liquor, grab a handful of tranquillizers (xanzolam was later replaced by Librium, or Chlordiazepoxide, a sedative and hypnotic medication of the benzodiazepine class), and swallow those two alone. Eventually, her substance dependence influenced her career. During the Paris Remy-Vallon Invitational in 1967, Beth was able to beat every opponent, but the night before her match with Vasily Borgov (fictional character), the Russian Grandmaster who’s the current world champion, Beth was drinking, causing her to lose the game the next morning because of her inebriation or hangover. After losing the game in Paris, Beth went back home and started drinking again every day and even more excessively to the point where when she wasn’t asleep, she was either hungover or drinking. At this point of her life, Beth was heavily dependent on drugs and alcohol, and her mood was unstable and anxious, causing her to be irritable. This behaviour is jeopardizing her relationship with her friends, loved ones, and her social life as they were either harmed and pushed out by Beth after trying to help her quit or lost in touch because she was busy drinking, influencing her career in a bad way, such as losing important matches, and spending a great deal amount of time on the substance. The amount of substances Beth was having often is greater than what she intended to, she was craving for the substances when she

was not using them, and she has gone through withdrawal and failed by having even more of them. She has the substance on a regular basis and will increase the amount and frequency when facing a major downfall in life, such as failure in her career, relationship, or loss of loved ones. Although much of her behaviour suggests the tendency to have substance use disorder, there were no specific diagnoses made in the series, possibly due to historical factors and Beth's not seeking medical help.

Step 3

No specific diagnosis was named in the story.

Symptoms:

Although there is no specific diagnosis that was named in the series, we can tell from the plot that many of Beth's behaviours are fitting to the criteria of substance use disorder in tranquillizers and alcohol. Out of many diagnosis indicators of substance use disorder, Beth certainly shows some symptoms that match the criteria. Let's first look at her alcohol usage. When Beth starts drinking, she spends a lot of time on it, won't stop until she is drunk, and spends another large amount of time on being hungover. She will tell herself that it will just be a little drink and nothing is going to happen, where, in fact, she can not control herself and drink more than she intended to. Beth, under her friend's help, has tried to quit the usage of the substance and found out how effective she could be when sober, but failed eventually. When she is not within reach of the substance (on an airplane), Beth will crave it by announcing that she is going to get drunk once she's able to get them. All these behaviours show Beth's impairment of control which is one of the four grouping of symptoms. Beth also failed to fulfill major role obligations in her career, an important chess match, because of alcohol. She continues to drink

even drinking causes her friends and lovers to distance her either because they are trying to help her quit and receive Beth's bad temper or they simply left because Beth is getting worse and worse with her addiction. These actions suggest social impairment in Beth, which is also part of the 4 groupings of symptoms in substance use disorder. With symptoms such as knowing the harm of the substance but continuously using it or developing a tolerance for the substance, Beth's behaviours have matched most of the criteria for substance use disorder.

Similar to her case on alcohol, Beth has behaviours that match most of the substance use disorder indicators in both the impairment of control and social impairment categories. Starting the habit at such a young age forged her strong dependence on the substance. Somewhere slightly different is that Beth went through withdrawals for tranquillizers. During her time in the orphanage, a law was published forbidding organizations from giving children tranquillizers and other kinds of drugs. Beth was not able to use the substance and went through withdrawal, feeling nauseous, headache, and anxiety. She was not able to focus on the chess game match she was about to have and was in a terrible mood. While craving "the pills" and in extreme pain, Beth's friends offer her the last few tranquillizers she got and ease her pain. Beth then replaced the old tranquillizer, xanzolam, with Librium, another newly released tranquillizer introduced by Beth's own mother, but her addiction stayed the same.

According to DSM-5, a problematic pattern of usage leading to clinically significant impairment or distress can be fulfilled by at least 2 symptoms in the lists within a 12-month period, and Beth has experienced about 8-9 of them within about 2 years (alcohol) and 10 years (tranquillizer), suggesting that Beth has a high chance of being a sufferer of substance use disorder. In addition, because she has more than 6 symptoms shown, her substance use disorder severity may be seen as severe level. However, because Beth herself did not look for help from a psychiatrist or

psychologist, we were not able to get access to her full substance usage condition, duration, and amount. We can only base on what the TV series has shown us the audience to determine her severity. Also, we will have to consider some other co-occurring mental disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder where the substance serves as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress and anxiety or PTSD causing impaired functions, in order to get a full image of Beth's case.

Treatment:

The treatment plan involved a thorough detoxification program to address the physical dependence on substances and education about the substances since Beth does not seem to understand how severe the consequences of continuously using the substance could be. Also, group therapy can be applied here to not only give the patient strength in the belongingness of a group but also serve as a practice for her social skills and communication. Another option that might work is motivational interviewing. Due to Beth's love for challenges, motivational interviewing might spark her desire for improvement and enhance changes. Intervention from her friends could help as well as they have all given her big help in her career and were really close at one point. Whatever the treatment might fit for Beth, we'll have to make sure it is done through the "warm turkey" concept of treatment since she is possibly a severe SUD sufferer.

Step 4

Reflection:

The Queen's Gambit" presents a compelling depiction of mental illness, particularly in its portrayal of Beth Harmon's struggle with substance use disorder (SUD). While the series is generally commendable in shedding light on the complexities of mental health, there are both

beneficial and potentially harmful aspects to consider. The depiction of Beth's SUD serves as a powerful narrative that humanizes individuals grappling with addiction. Many of the depictions in the story related to SUD are quite accurate and, in some ways, educational and warning. By presenting a high-functioning character like Beth contending with SUD, the series contributes to destigmatizing addiction and showcasing that it can affect anyone, regardless of external accomplishments. Furthermore, because of how the series tells the story that begins with Beth's childhood, we as audiences are able to see how Beth's dependence and addiction to the substance gradually grow as she grows older and faces more obstacles and negativity in life. Beth's progression from occasional wine consumption to reliance on sedatives and stimulants is a realistic representation of how substance use disorders often develop. The depiction also captures the isolating and self-destructive aspects of addiction, showcasing Beth's withdrawal from social connections and the negative impact on her chess performance.

However, the depiction is not entirely without pitfalls. It somewhat perpetuates the stereotype that substance use disorders are closely tied to high-pressure environments and success. By linking Beth's substance use directly to the stresses of her chess career, the series risks oversimplifying the diverse factors that contribute to addiction. This oversimplification may inadvertently reinforce the misconception that substance abuse is merely a response to external pressures rather than a complex interplay of genetic, psychological, and environmental factors. One other thing that the series is missing is a more detailed description of how Beth copes with her addiction and seeks treatment. A more thorough exploration of Beth's mental and emotional state, possibly through therapy scenes or introspective moments, would have added depth to her character and provided a clearer understanding of the factors contributing to her SUD.

In comparison to other portrayals of substance use disorders in media, *The Queen's Gambit* stands out for its avoidance of sensationalism. It doesn't glamorize or vilify addiction but rather portrays it as a complex, challenging issue. Unlike many other media works, the addiction of the main character does not only play the role of character build-ups and artistic characteristic design, it was brought up several times and was one of the big obstacles that the main character has to overcome, showing how the series was willing to put effort into designing the character's mental disorder and its important influence in life. However, it falls short in comparison to some other productions that more explicitly explore the psychological and environmental factors influencing addiction. After all, it is a show that focuses on chess playing and how Beth was able to overcome challenges both in life and on the chess board and become the best player in the world.

The Queen's Gambit provides a generally good depiction of substance use disorder, humanizing the struggles of a high-functioning individual. While it avoids some common pitfalls and contributes to reducing stigma, there is room for improvement in terms of depth and nuance in exploring the complexity of addiction. The series contributes positively to the ongoing conversation about mental health in media, showcasing that even the most successful individuals can grapple with profound internal challenges.