

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the introduction. It consists of five parts: the background of the study, research questions, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, and the scope and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Based on Udry (1994, p. 4), the idea of gender refers to the distinctions in the roles that men and women play in society. The term "gender" also represents a cultural construct that differentiates between the roles, attitudes, and emotions that men and women encounter in society (Mareta & Afriana, 2024, p. 70). According to Beauvoir (2011, p. 26), throughout history, men have often been seen as the standard or universal representation of humanity, while women have been defined in contrast to men, as the "Other." This perception has allowed men to justify their lack of effort to understand women, leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes, much like those found in societies with rigid hierarchical structures. Based on this explanation, there is a difference between men and women in the idea of gender that we call inequality. According to Friedan (1963, p. 75), "Only men had the vote: the freedom to shape the major decisions of society. Only men had the freedom to love, and enjoy love, and decide for themselves in the eyes of their God the problems of right and wrong". This further supports the idea that the power and role differences between men and women might lead to inequalities.

According to Freedman (2007, p. 22), society believed that men were superior to women in every aspect of life, particularly in significant responsibilities. Meanwhile, women were viewed as frail beings. According to societal perception, women are born with the belief that they should not do what most men do (Mareta & Afriana, 2024, p. 68). This view asserts that women's roles are often dominated by men, resulting in men

having greater responsibilities in work demands or being responsible for all aspects of community life. According to Tyson (2006, p. 200), men are naturally rational, strong, protective, and decisive, while women are naturally emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive. This statement has illustrated the differences in the roles of men and women that cause injustice in social life. It also impacts changing stereotypes that women are far less empowered than men. According to Sutanto (2017, p. 4), women get a bad social view, such as being expected to be silent and to give in more. Such as the view that women will only be allowed to work as housewives, while men can achieve whatever they want as their achievements, this is a reflection of gender inequality.

Gender inequality affects women in ways that include making them appear weaker than males in society (Mardiyani & Tawami, 2022, p. 166). As well as believing that women are inferior to men, some of them even prohibit gender equality, which means the prohibition of treating women equally (Mareta & Afriana, 2024, p. 68). This illustrates that some people still experience an unequal view of women and men. Ultimately, this led some of them to take the initiative to change the circumstances and perceptions of their inferior role to men, where resistance was represented as a form of defence. Women's resistance is generally a process of enabling women to take control of their lives and rights, such as making decisions and fully participating in all areas they expect (Wurangian et al., 2023, p. 156). Several issues have been included as a form of resistance to gender inequality, such as reflecting gender equality, voicing women's rights, and social justice for women. Women do have a more important role than men in society, therefore the women's resistance movement can provide a voice for women to fight for their rights, aspirations and desires (Trisnawijaya & Kurniawati, 2024, p. 106).

Gender inequality and women's resistance are also phenomena that we can find in the world of literature as a form of meaning and message that the author uses in the life of a story with a feminist theme. This topic can also be found in other literary works

such as poetry, novels, prose, or drama. From literary works, readers will know many perspectives from various points of view, especially on the topic of feminism about gender inequality and their response to women's resistance fields.

This study uses the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* (2022) by Bonnie Garmus as a source of data. The writer chose liberal feminism because this story raises the theme of the struggle of women during the 1960s, where at that time men were a form of domination and higher power in the field of roles and jobs in the scientific field. This also represents the inequality between women and men at that time. Elizabeth Zott was an ambitious woman with the confidence and high expectations to fight for her dignity in the obstacles she faced as a chemist. She faced many obstacles in her professional life, often experiencing acts of inequality in the workplace. She also usually received indecent treatment, such as humiliation because of her scientific achievements that were frequently underestimated. In her struggle and hope, she always tries to make her career not underestimated and prove that as a woman, she is not as weak or lacking in showing evidence of her intelligence in the field of chemistry as her male-dominated colleagues. From her struggle as a chemist against the conventional views of society, she finally set aside her ambitions and dreams as a chemist. She taught many women to always stand by their expectations. She taught and inspired women to question and speak out against the societal norms of the time, especially for undervalued women to remain independent and empower themselves.

The novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus was published on April 05, 2022, by Doubleday, a prominent American publishing company, with the first publication in the United States. In this story, Bonnie Garmus tells many perspectives on gender inequality and women's resistance experienced by Elizabeth Zott. This novel also received a "positive" accord, as the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* was named the best book of 2022 by Barnes & Noble, and in 2023, it became the most borrowed book from several public libraries. The novel won the German Independent Booksellers Favorite Book of the Year (Das Lieblingsbuch der Unabhängigen Buchhandlungen

2022), Hay Festival Book of the Year 2022, Dymocks Book of the Year 2022 (Australia), Goodreads Choice Awards - Best Debut 2022, and many other awards (Penguin, 2023).

Several previous studies used the same phenomenon issues to analyze and also inspire the writer. The first study is *The Portrayal of Women's Empowerment Through the Main Character in North Country Movie* by Wulandari et al. (2022) This previous study explores the kind of women empowerment dimension portrayed by the main female character in North Country movies which shows women's power. The second previous study is *Gender Inequality and Feminism in Arundhati Roy's The God Small Thing* by Mardiyani & Tawami (2022). This previous study uses a feminist theory and explores the gender inequality in the novel The God Small Thing, which focuses on subordination, stereotypes, violence, marginalization, and the double burden.

The third previous study is *Rejection against the Patriarchal Society in Stephen Chbosky and Evan Spiliotopoulos's Beauty and The Beast* by Sampe (2022). This previous study explores the equality of gender, women deserve, liberty, justice, and the same rights as men. The fourth previous study is *Patriarchy and Women's Struggle in Selected Boom and Post-Boom Novels* by Pillado (2023). This previous study explores threats and challenges of patriarchy in female characters in the novel Selected Boom and Post Boom and portrays what kind of their struggles. The fifth previous study is *The Portrayal of Liberal Feminism through the Main Character of Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre Novel* by Sari et al. (2023). This previous study explores Jane Eyre's challenges of gender norms of her time by seeking knowledge and intellectual freedom, and by striving for autonomy in her choices, despite societal pressures

The sixth previous study is *Intertwined Gender Inequality in Desy Anwar's Growing Pains* by Zulfie & Kusumayanti (2023). This previous study explores gender-based violence such as asymmetrical family systems, misogynistic practices, gender

identity threats, deviant female promiscuity, and cruel motherhood portrayal. The seventh previous study is *Women's Empowerment: Staging Power Resistance in Oshin* (2013) by Tisnawijaya & Kurniati (2024). This previous study explores power resistance and how the protagonist declares her resilience through traditional gender. The last previous study is *Gender Inequality Analysis Represented in "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott* by Mareta & Afriana (2024). This previous study explores the differences in gender discrimination in Jo's life such as subordination, stereotypes, marginalization, the burden of work and the last is violence

This study addresses a significant study gap by focusing on gender inequality and woman resistance within the context of a modern literary work, *Lessons in Chemistry*, set in the 1960s. Unlike previous studies that have predominantly analyzed classical literature, such as *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, or films like *North Country* and *Beauty and the Beast*, this study utilizes a contemporary novel that reflects both historical and modern perspectives on gender dynamics. While the earlier study, such as the analysis of *Little Women* and *Latin American boom and post-boom* novels, emphasizes broader societal roles and struggles within familial or cultural frameworks, this study specifically examines the professional discrimination encountered by a female scientist in a male-dominated field.

Additionally, previous studies often adopt frameworks like Jo Rowland's empowerment theory or the broader patriarchal critique of Simone de Beauvoir. In contrast, this study employs a liberal feminist lens that emphasizes individual empowerment, resistance, and equality within professional settings. Moreover, by concentrating on Elizabeth Zott's nuanced internal and external challenges as she navigates gender bias in a scientific environment, this study contributes a unique perspective on the intersection of professional ambition and gender-based resistance. Thus, the novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on both the individual and professional dimensions of gender inequality, as well as its engagement with

contemporary literary texts, offering fresh insights into the discourse of woman resistance and liberal feminism.

1.2 Research Questions

There are two questions in this thesis as limited discussion in *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus. The following questions are:

1. What forms of gender inequality does Elizabeth face in her professional life as a chemist?
2. How does Elizabeth carry out woman resistance as a response to her defence of gender inequality in her society?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

About the study questions above, the objectives of this study are to discover:

1. To identify what kind of gender inequality in the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* that Elizabeth Zott experienced in her life.
2. To describe how Elizabeth Zott's form of resistance in maintaining existence for herself.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Hopefully, this research can provide some benefits to readers, especially in literary studies. Theoretically, this research is expected to be more familiar with literary studies, especially Friedan's liberal feminism theory (1981). Practically, through this research, readers are expected to fully understand and practice so that there is no more gender inequality for women, fight back or be sensitive to resistance responses, and understand the benefits of women's power. Then this study can be used as a reference material in relevant studies.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this is the theory used in this study, namely the liberal feminism theory by Friedan (1981). Liberal feminism is used to see how the main female

character faced gender inequality in her life. Then the theory of woman resistance by Scott (1985) to see how the main female character uses self-defence as a form of challenge to the gender inequality she experiences. This study is limited to the main character's utterances and the author's narration in the novel *Lessons in Chemistry*.