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Literary Analysis of the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my family, whose support and belief in my potential have been a constant source of strength throughout this academic journey. To the women in my life, especially my mom, my grandma and those strong women I grew up with. To those who came before me and those who walked beside me, thank you for inspiring me to question, to persevere, and to raise my voice. To every woman who has felt afraid of exploiting their entire potential, just because of the societal norms imposed on society to us, women.

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Abstract

This research presents a feminist literary analysis of the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus, focusing on how gender stereotypes and the feminist struggles of American women in the 1950s and 1960s are portrayed through the life of the protagonist Elizabeth Zott. Through a qualitative approach, the investigation examines the challenges faced by professional women in a male-dominated environment, the societal expectations imposed on them, and the evolution of feminist ideals across different historical waves. Drawing on feminist literary theory and the contributions of feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Elaine Showalter, the study interprets Elizabeth's resistance to traditional roles and her pursuit of scientific recognition. The analysis also contrasts historical feminist activism with the contemporary rise of movements such as #TradWives, revealing how gender roles continue to evolve yet remain contested.

Throughout this study, literature is revealed not only as a mirror of social realities but also as a tool for critique and transformation. *Lessons in Chemistry* becomes a literary testimony that invites readers to rethink patriarchal structures from the female perspective, highlighting the importance of women's voices in spaces where they have been historically silenced. By linking narrative fiction with feminist theory and real historical context, this research contributes to a critical understanding of literature as a vehicle for social change and the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

Resumen

Esta investigación presenta un análisis literario feminista de la novela *Lessons in Chemistry* de Bonnie Garmus, centrado en cómo se representan los estereotipos de género y las luchas feministas de las mujeres estadounidenses en las décadas de 1950 y 1960 a través de la vida de la protagonista, Elizabeth Zott. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo, la investigación examina los desafíos que enfrentaron las mujeres profesionales en un entorno dominado por hombres, las expectativas sociales impuestas sobre ellas y la evolución de los ideales feministas a lo largo de las distintas olas históricas. Basándose en la teoría literaria feminista y en las contribuciones de pensadoras como Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler y Elaine Showalter, el estudio interpreta la resistencia de Elizabeth a los roles tradicionales y su búsqueda de reconocimiento científico. El análisis también contrasta el activismo feminista histórico con el surgimiento de movimientos contemporáneos como el de las #TradWives, revelando cómo los roles de género continúan evolucionando, aunque siguen siendo motivo de disputa.

Durante este estudio, la literatura se revela no solo como un reflejo de las realidades sociales, sino también como una herramienta de crítica y transformación. *Lessons in Chemistry* se convierte en un testimonio literario que invita a repensar las estructuras patriarcales desde una perspectiva femenina, resaltando la importancia de las voces de las mujeres en espacios donde históricamente han sido silenciadas. Al vincular la narrativa de ficción con la teoría feminista y el contexto histórico real, esta investigación aporta a una comprensión crítica de la literatura como vehículo de cambio social y de la lucha continua por la igualdad de género.

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Chapter I

Introductory Framework

1.1 Problem Statement

Feminism is a social movement that started many decades ago. Raina (2017) defines it as “Feminism’ is a wide range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes” (p. 3372) And, as old as it is, it has helped many women of different generations, as we could compare Elizabeth Zott in the 1960s and women in 2025. Feminism has evolved, and modern women's rights may be attributed to pioneers like Elizabeth, who were unafraid to challenge societal expectations and thus helped break down stereotypes. As an example of that statement, I can mention the second wave of feminism that started in 1968, Haradhan (2022) writes in his article about the waves of feminism that “The second wave of feminism is extended the domain of feminine politics against sexist ways of men to the private lives of women.” (p. 11) As you can see, the 60s were a tough decade for women, and for that reason, it is important to remember and celebrate the pioneers of that decade. Our society is changing, a couple of years ago, when I was in high school feminism was in its pure glory, as Elting (2019) says “This past year, this feminist surge has reached fever pitch. In the 2010s, women fought back” (p. 01) But, if you spend some time on social media, apps like Instagram and TikTok, you may realize that there is a new “trend” called the “trad wife movement” this “trend” aims for women to go back to the kitchen, to stay in the house and raise children, as it was seventy years ago, and as it was during in the setting of *Lessons in Chemistry* we can also use the definition that Valderrama gives us “ The #tradwives movement is a trend in which women who identify themselves as “traditional wives” express their ideas and values on social media in terms of traditional gender roles and families”. On the other hand, I firmly believe that women should be able to decide whether they want to be mothers and dedicate their lives to

their children, or delay that wish and focus on their professional careers first, and not be criticized for choosing one or another. This project aims to analyze how the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus addresses gender stereotypes and the feminist struggle of American women in the 1950s and 1960s.

1.2 Objectives

The main purpose of this investigation is to demonstrate how women in different decades had to face difficulties just because of gender roles and stereotypes.

1.2.1 General Objective

To analyze how the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus addresses gender stereotypes and the feminist struggle of American women in the 1950s and 1960s.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- To interpret the character of scientist Elizabeth Zott as a starting point to examine the struggle that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment
- To explore why society at the time did not accept that a woman could choose between getting married and starting a family or studying and becoming a professional
- To demonstrate how the feminist struggle of the 1950s and 1960s impacted the feminist movement of the present era

1.3 Justification of the Study

The feminist movement is a latent subject in our society today. In the United States, for example, an article written by Barroso (2020) states that six of ten women identify with feminist ideals. This is thanks to broadcasting literature, movies, and TV shows. With my present literary analysis, I want to make known a little about the feminist struggle of American women of that time, a time when the role of women was to be at home raising children and taking care of their families, leaving aside their dreams of being professionals and at a time when men were the sole providers. I want to highlight the courage of

those women who decided not to comply with social norms and do what made their hearts happy, as is the case of the protagonist of this work, Elizabeth Zott, who decided not to get married, and, besides that, to study and work in a field dominated by men, aware of the consequences and difficulties she would face, without knowing that, from one day to the next, her world would change. In addition, Bonnie Garmus uses splendid language; with her ideas and literary figures, she narrates Elizabeth Zott's experiences, leading us to a deeper analysis of the subject in question.

1.4 Antecedents

To understand the present literary analysis, it is important to know more about certain topics that are mentioned in the paper for example, “Feminist Literary Theory Analysis” a literary wave that examines the role of gender in literature, (a more in-depth explanation is going to be given later in this paper), and Feminism in Contemporary Literature. Moreover, the novel, *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus, centers its topic and themes on the struggles women in the 1950s and 1960s faced as a consequence of living in a patriarchal society full of already existing gender roles and stereotypes. The Feminist Literary Criticism theory helps to analyze the novel from the perspective of those women who struggled for their rights seventy years ago.

Feminist Literary Criticism Exponents

First, I must talk about “Feminist Literary Criticism” and its exponents, Simone de Beauvoir with “The Second Sex”, Judith Butler with "Gender Trouble", and Virginia Woolf with "A Room of One's Own", to name a few.

Simone de Beauvoir, “The Second Sex”

In this literary piece, the author Simone de Beauvoir talks about how women have historically been referred to as “the other” in a society dominated by men. She states that the idea of femininity being fragile and soft is an idea construed due to the gender roles imposed by society.

Using this philosophy, she encourages women to break the societal rules imposed by men and use their voices to be seen. Melonic (2024) adds that:

According to de Beauvoir, even before she becomes a woman, the girl is already oppressed. Her destiny is already established—she will have to “catch” a husband and derive the meaning of her existence from him. She must surrender because “physically and morally she has become inferior to boys and incapable of competing with them ... [and] her humility engenders all her failings; its source is in the adolescent girl’s past, in the society around her, and precisely in this future that is proposed to her.” (para. 13)

Judith Butler, “Gender Trouble”

On the other hand, there is Judith Butler in “Gender Trouble,” where she talks about gender not being an “identity” but rather a social construct established by repeated actions. She discusses the difference between sex and gender, implying that even biological sex is shaped by cultural norms. Following the line of gender and sex, Yadavalli (2024) adds that “Butler differs from the scholars that came before them by claiming that both the identities were constructed by the society” (p. 992)

Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own”

The following antecedent is by Virginia Woolf in “A Room of One’s Own.” This is an extended essay where she explores the relationship between women, writing, and financial independence. She argues that women need financial independence and personal space to write, create, and be themselves. Critiques the historical exclusion of women in Literature, using “Shakespeare’s sister” as a fictional character to empathize with her ideas on that topic. On the other hand, Mambrol (2020) claims that “How is it possible for women to be represented at all when ‘woman’, in poetry and fiction, is already a sign for something else? In these terms, ‘woman’ is a signifier in patriarchal discourse” (para. 13)

Cesar Guillermo Gómez Méndez, “Literary Analysis of Gender Roles of Women within the Novel

"Island Beneath the Sea" by Writer Isabel Allende Using the Feminist Approach”

Among the national antecedents, there is the case of the thesis of student César Guillermo Gómez Méndez, done in November of 2024 and titled “Literary Analysis of Gender Roles of Women within the

Novel "Island Beneath the Sea" by Writer Isabel Allende Using the Feminist Approach. In this thesis, the author uses the Feminist approach and qualitative instruments to analyze the previously mentioned novel. His general objective was to analyze the gender-related challenges faced in the novel *Island Beneath the Sea*, and just like in *Lessons in Chemistry*, to identify similarities and differences in the situations lived by the novel's female characters in comparison to real-life scenarios women have faced over time. The writer's purpose was to answer the question, "What are the similarities found in the challenges faced by the female characters of the novel *Island Beneath the Sea*, compared to the reality lived by women in Costa Rica in the year 2024?". Also, the author analyzed data that showed racism, classism, misogyny, and the reality of feminism in both the fictional world and real life, and the exclusion that women face to this day. On the other hand, he mentions the differences between the two periods, how some characters had easier circumstances than others, and how that is represented in aspects of real life. This thesis is relevant to the present research because it also uses the feminist approach to analyze how women, no matter the decade, have always been treated as servants instead of people. Unlike Gómez Méndez's analysis, centered in the 18th-century colonial Caribbean, this study focuses on a different setting, the 20th-century scientific-academic world, and shows how, although living in a more advanced society, disparities still exist. For that reason, the previously mentioned works as an excellent precedent to demonstrate how, in modern society, women still get treated differently and sets a precedent for newer generations to keep studying and researching about the topic.

Valeria Sevilla Sancho, "Literary Analysis of the book A Pair of Silk Stockings Using the Feminist Approach"

The following antecedent is by another Costa Rican, in this case, the thesis of student Valeria Sevilla Sancho, done in July 2024, titled "Literary Analysis of the book *A Pair of Silk Stockings* Using the Feminist Approach" in which the author analyzed the novel *A Pair of Silk Stockings* by Kate Chopin. Her general objective for the descriptive and qualitative investigation was to analyze the role of working-class women of the late 1800s in the family and society, as well as their challenges and economic

limitations in the novel mentioned previously, as well as to compare them with the modern world we live in, using the Feminist Approach and different literary devices.

In this thesis, the author compares the past vs the present and the struggles of the women in the book (past) who faced limitations such as economic limitations, lack of opportunities to study, and places to work, compared to the limitations of Costa Rican women in today's society, she empathizes how these issues are still present in society but in a different way. On the other hand, she also mentions how social classes and economic status can impact women's lives, both in the book and in real life, as well as how the lack of education among women is a persistent problem that does not allow women to move on.

She discussed a similar topic to the one in *Lessons in Chemistry*, which is gender roles and how, when used in an "ultra traditional" way, can be highly dangerous for women who want to achieve greater achievements in their lives. They can affect the way women are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes, society does not realize how much gender norms can affect someone's life and how they can lead to the perpetuation of violent behaviors. An example of this is present in *Lessons in Chemistry*, when the protagonist, pregnant, is kicked out of her job at Hastings just because of being pregnant out of wedlock.

On the other hand, among the findings of the study, the researcher found out that the issues that women face are the result of social, economic, and political oppression due to the established gender roles and a misogynistic society.

Finally, this thesis provides a solid foundation for the literary analysis of *Lessons in Chemistry* because it shows how society imposed certain limitations on women in both *A Pair of Silk Stockings* and *Lessons in Chemistry*. Furthermore, it reinforces the value of using a feminist lens when analyzing literature that challenges traditional gender roles.

Benna Köseoğlu, "The Change in the Reflection of Gender Roles from Proto-Science Fiction to Science Fiction with the Rise of Feminism: Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* and Mary Robinette Kowal's *The Calculating Stars*".

Moving on with the international antecedents, there is the case of a comparative and contrast article written by Benna Köseoğlu in 2021 titled “The Change in the Reflection of Gender Roles from Proto-Science Fiction to Science Fiction with the Rise of Feminism: Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* and Mary Robinette Kowal’s *The Calculating Stars*”. Here, the author explores how, before the rise of feminism, women were oppressed, especially in Literature. The main objective of the writer was to make a literary analysis by comparing and contrast both novels previously mentioned by discussing the ways these two female writers try to achieve destroying gender based stereotypical roles, at the same time, she examines, how thanks to the rise of feminism female writers started to appear in science fiction, especially their roles in science and technology.

Concerning feminism and historical context, the author mentions that, as popular belief has it, women were not supposed to be part of the workforce due to their gender, and that they cannot prove skills in the scientific and technology field, as happens to Elizabeth Zott in *Lessons in Chemistry*. The author argues it is not surprising that women were not allowed to demonstrate their talents in the outside world, just because people thought that they were created for dealing with household matters and domestic issues without participating in anything more. The author mentions that the waves of Feminism show how women have suffered a considerable number of issues throughout history, and, without them, women could not have succeeded in different aspects of life, in this case, science and technology.

Zahra Saed, “A Socialist-Feminist Analysis of Paulo Coelho’s Novel *The Spy* (2016)”

Finally, there is an article written by Zahra Saed in 2025 titled “A Socialist-Feminist Analysis of Paulo Coelho’s Novel *The Spy* (2016)”. Using a Feminist perspective, the research objectives for this qualitative textual analysis were to investigate the main character’s ordeals from a Feminist perspective, studying them because of male hierarchy, also, to investigate the main character’s sufferings that hold their own despite her remarkable professional success because of some deep-rooted strands of social structures she was surrounded by.

The author says that, among the issues she wanted to address were the fact that the subjection and

resistance of women about such social realities as class-based interests, class struggle, and more were crucial for her investigation. On the other hand, she mentions that the principal focus of her study was to understand Mata Hari's ordeals in pursuit of independence from a socialist-feminist perspective.

The novel is about Mata Hari (born Margaretha Zelle), an ambitious woman hailing from Holland with dreams of becoming a teacher. Sadly, and as it happens to Elizabeth Zott in *Lessons in Chemistry*, Mata is sexually offended by her school's principal, crushing her dreams. Not only that, but this tragedy happened while her family was suffering an economic crisis, which ended up with them losing the family business they had. Mari, in her urgency for economic help, marries a captain from the East Indies, but quickly he becomes a domestic abuser and cheater, leading to her leaving that marriage and traveling to Paris to become an exotic dancer. The author adds that the tragedy of her failed marriage shows how, against popular opinion, the institution of marriage is a disillusioned source of capital and security where women's labour is not recognized. This relates to what happens in *Lessons in Chemistry* and why the main character, Elizabeth Zott, did not want to get married.

Feminism in Contemporary Literature

Moving on to the second topic of these antecedents, it is necessary to discuss Feminism in Contemporary Literature. As with any other literary wave that has to evolve with time passing, Feminism has had to make that leap as well, always with the same aim to analyze how gender, power, and identity, but with the twist of talking about equal opportunities for men a women, reproductive rights, and media representation. As Crenshaw (2015) adds, "One significant trend is the rise of intersectional feminism, which examines how intersecting identities such as race, class, and sexuality influence women's experiences and representation in literature" (as cited in Diwan and Thakur, 2021, p.9362)

1.5 Scope

The novel focuses on the decade of the 50s and 60s. It was a somewhat complicated time for women, to say the least, since there were firmly established gender roles. The woman had the role of caregiver and housewife, and the man was the one who was in charge of bringing money and food to the

table. Apart from this, as we can see in the novel, women had to be "submissive" to men and even felt like figures of power. We can see this in one of the first chapters of the novel, where the main character, Elizabeth Zott, suffers harassment by her PhD thesis tutor at UCLA; this event causes Elizabeth to lose her opportunity to get her degree and her place of work since she knew that if she said anything to the authorities, they would do nothing more than judge her. This story is repeated with one of the secondary characters near the novel's end.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as a foundation in every research project, providing concepts and historical context for the topic itself, in this case, the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus. This chapter serves as a guide to help readers unfamiliar with the topic familiarize themselves with it and look up definitions they are not familiar with. As you probably saw by the objectives of this research the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* is analyzed using a feministic perspective, my objectives for this research are to use the character of Elizabeth Zott as a starting point to analyze the struggles women in science had to face, explore the reasons why women were criticized for not following the gender roles established in that decade and to demonstrate how feminism in the 50s and 60s impacted modern age feminism.

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the literary analysis of *Lessons in Chemistry*. It provides essential historical, literary, and feminist context to facilitate a deeper understanding of the novel and its characters. There is going to be a discussion of key aspects of Feminism, such as feminism as a literary theory, historical and social context, the struggle of women in science, and the contemporary narrative of the #Tradwifes movement. On the other hand, there is also going to be a little examination of the historical background and context of the research, and tie it up with the concept of literary criticism, a key concept to understand some authors cited in this research. Moreover, the chapter defines the most important definitions and aspects of Feminism, as well as the definition of the different waves of Feminism and how social media has contributed to reaching younger generations of activists.

2.1 Feminism

So, first things first, as was previously stated, Raina (2017) defines it as “Feminism' is a wide range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes” (p. 3372). And, it is not

a secret that women from many different decades and all around the world have always fought for their rights. Whether in the United States or Costa Rica, feminism has evolved.

2.1.2 Why is it important?

Moving on, it is also necessary to understand the reasons why Feminism is still important to this day. It is important to understand that, although social media and society in general have tried to sell the idea that men and women are equal in modern society, it is not a complete truth. The fact that out there are still women without the right or possibility to study, women in the Middle East who are forced to marry men much older than them, makes this fight an everyday duty. Or the fact that some women are unable to decide what type of clothes to wear, they need the approval of their partners. As Varrial (2023) points it out, the gender gap is still a latent topic; women are working more than men and earning half the money they are paid by the hour, for example, a man gets one dollar an hour, a woman gets 50 cents, also, women spend three times more on unpaid domestic and care work as men. (para. 12) Sadly, women still need to fight to get the bare minimum in their jobs, apply for a job that it is well paid, in hopes of not getting assaulted by their male counterparts and fight against the stereotype that a woman being the leader or on top of an enterprise means that she is sleeping with a men to get that position. Patriarchal norms have brainwashed society's brain, making women think they are not able to hold a leadership position in a corporation, just because women are more sensitive and emotional, rather than men who act without thinking about the consequences. It is crucial to understand that Feminism is not fighting for a woman to get the position of a CEO but is fighting for those who have no social security, those women who, to bring food to the table for their children, accept lower-paying jobs, earning way less than what they deserve.

To conclude, feminism continues to be a necessary and urgent movement in today's world. Despite the progress made in some areas, millions of women still live under oppressive systems that limit their freedom, dignity, and potential. Gender equality is not just a slogan; it is a goal that demands

constant effort, awareness, and action. If women are denied basic rights, mistreated in the workplace, or silenced by social norms, feminism will remain essential. The fight is not only for opportunities, but for justice, respect, and the right to live a life free from discrimination and fear.

2.1.3 Feminism in Literature

Feminism is seen not only as a social movement but also as a way in which women can express themselves in different areas, such as literature, for example. However, before moving on, it is necessary to understand feminism in literature. Well, as Ali (2018) defines it, as a way of literature that supports the role of women and their rights to go against what society wants from them (p. 254)

2.1.4 Elaine Showalter's Feminism as a Literary Theory

Feminism as a literary theory is defined by Cape Coast University (n.d) as “As a theory, feminist literary theory is a female-sexed and female–embodied social subject whose constitution is to correct conflictual histories of women correct the masculinist historical, social and literary images of women as ‘others’” (p.02) Since the main definitions have been covered, one great expositor of this theory is the writer and activist Elaine Showalter, Elaine Showalter’s (1979) theory of feminist literary criticism, where she “Showalter categorizes feminist criticism into woman as a reader, and woman as a writer. Woman as a reader or feminist critique focuses on literature written by men” (as seen in Pallavi, 2025). Also, Elaine Showalter (1979) says that this approach was used to study women’s literature by thinking about their struggles, relationships with other women, and their different perceptions of life.

2.1.5 Waves of Feminism

2.1.5.1 First Wave of Feminism

Thankfully, in real life, big things were happening, feminism being one of them and it is that Feminism has defined, or society has defined three different “waves” of feminism, the story of *Lessons in Chemistry* takes place in the second wave, but to have a little bit more of historical background it is

necessary to refer to the first wave of feminism too, and well, as Molyneux, Dey, Gatto, et al (2021) wrote in their paper about new feminist activism they state that:

The first wave refers to the emergence of feminist collective action from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century and, as noted, has often been identified with the demand for suffrage. Suffrage was indeed a key demand of these early movements starting with the Seneca Falls convention in Baltimore (p. 06)

As previously cited, women from different periods of time have always fought for their rights, whether it was because of their right to vote or being able to pursue higher education.

Understanding the different waves of feminism provides essential context for analyzing the struggles depicted in *Lessons in Chemistry*. This historical perspective shows that the fight for women's rights did not begin in the 1960s but was the result of long-standing activism that began during the first wave. Recognizing the efforts of women from earlier periods allows a deeper appreciation of how each wave contributed to shaping the next. These movements demonstrate that the pursuit of gender equality has been a continuous and collective effort, playing a crucial role in the advancement of society.

2.1.5.2 Second Wave of Feminism

Having discussed the first wave of feminism (for context), the focus now switches to investigating what the second wave of feminism was. Who promoted it? What did you accomplish? Well, the second wave of feminism happened in the 1960s just in time for when birth control pills landed on the market and women were able to decide for themselves and not having a man to control it by them, hence as it was previously stated Clark, Farr, Isola, et al (n.d) add that the second wave of feminism addressed a wide range of women's rights concerns, including gender-based violence, reproductive autonomy, sexual liberation, wage equity, among other social and legal inequalities. (para. 01) The second wave of feminism was revolutionary; women were leaving behind the roles of housewives that men had imposed on them decades ago. They realized they could do more than just stay at home to raise kids and prepare their husbands' dinner at night. They felt important and valuable to society.

Continuing with the following point to investigate the second wave of feminism, it is important to know who the pioneers of this revolution were. As observed in this analysis, literature was a strong vehicle for self-expression during that time; hence, the examples given will be writers, as they were not only writers but also activists. This “revolution” was followed by Betty Friedan, a journalist and writer, with the publication of her book, “The Feminine Mystique,” in 1963, after she had read Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Second Sex.” In her book, she talked about how, after getting married and leaving her career behind to be a housewife, she felt unhappy and how she felt pressured to have a baby. She interviewed different groups of women and asked them about their experiences being housewives as well. Incredibly, most of them felt the same as her. Once published, the National Women’s History Museum (2020), Friedan’s work played a significant role in revitalizing the feminist movement, selling more than three million copies in just three years. It inspired middle-class women across the United States to mobilize in pursuit of gender equality in both the social and political spheres. Finally, after all that battle, what did women accomplish? On August 26, 1970, after a long day of protests around different cities of the United States, women were fighting for “free abortion on demand, no forced sterilization; free community-controlled 24-hour childcare centers; and equal opportunities in jobs and education”. (Rosenstock, 2021, para. 11) All of the previous definitions are key to understanding the struggles not only Elizabeth Zott had to face in the novel, but also the rest of the female characters presented in the novel.

In conclusion, the second wave of feminism marked a turning point in the history of women's rights, as it challenged deeply rooted social norms and gave voice to women's personal and collective experiences. The movement empowered women to question their traditional roles and demand greater autonomy over their bodies, careers, and futures. Figures like Betty Friedan used literature as a powerful tool to reflect the dissatisfaction of many women and to mobilize others toward change. The achievements of this period, though the result of persistent struggle, created a strong foundation for future progress in gender equality. These historical elements are essential to fully understand the experiences of

the female characters in *Lessons in Chemistry*, especially the challenges faced by Elizabeth Zott in a society that constantly tried to limit her potential.

2.1.5.3 Third Wave of Feminism

On the other hand, it is necessary to mention the third wave of Feminism. However, it does not relate to *Lessons in Chemistry* (because it is a different time); it is important for discussing some aspects that will be analyzed in the research next. The third wave of Feminism started in the 1990s and continued until 2010, carried out by women born in the 1960s and 1970s. The third wave of Feminism was promoted by Gen X American women in an era full of changes. Interestingly, the promoters of this Third Wave were the daughters of Second Wave Feminists, such as the case of Rebecca Walker, daughter of Second Wave Feminist Alice Walker.

This third wave of Feminism according to Masterclass (2022) this third wave of feminism refers to a stage of political activism that aimed to strengthen women's civil rights and achieve greater social equality. This wave followed the first and second waves and is usually placed between the early 1990s and the 2010s, a time that eventually gave way to the fourth wave with the emergence of social media.

Among the issues Third-wave Feminists wanted to address, College of the Redwoods added the following: Beauty Ideals and Standards: Third-wave feminism places greater emphasis on beauty ideals compared to earlier feminist movements. While some activists choose to reject these standards entirely by avoiding practices such as wearing makeup or following diets, others choose to selectively embrace certain aspects of traditional beauty, doing so deliberately and without accepting the full set of conventional expectations tied to femininity.

Pornography: Pornography has turned into a point of contention within feminism; often seen to measure either one's dedication to challenging the patriarchy or one's interest in defying traditional feminist norms through provocative opposition.

Reproductive Rights: Reproductive rights rest on the principle that every individual's dignity and equality entitles them to both the right and responsibility to make their own reproductive choices. Having access to

information about human sexuality and reproduction is essential for making informed decisions, as is the availability of the services needed to carry out those choices.

Intersection of Race and Gender: Instead of assuming that all women faced the same forms of oppression, women of color challenged singular theories of gender and focused on the diverse experiences among women.

Among the major exponents in this Third Wave were Judith Butler, Rebecca Walker, and Naomi Wolf.

In summary, the third wave of Feminism marked a significant period of activism led by Generation X women, building upon the foundations laid by previous waves. It focused on a variety of complex issues, such as beauty standards, pornography, reproductive rights, and the intersectionality of race and gender. Although it does not directly relate to *Lessons in Chemistry* due to the difference in historical context, understanding this wave is essential for analyzing the topics addressed later in this research. Key figures like Judith Butler, Rebecca Walker, and Naomi Wolf exemplify the diversity and depth of this feminist movement.

2.1.5.4 Fourth wave of Feminism

2.1.5.4.1 Definition and Context

Finally, there is the fourth wave of Feminism. This fourth wave is the wave of Feminism that is happening currently. It is estimated that it started in 2012, and it has been extended to the present. This fourth wave of Feminism has been characterized by having most of its militants being young women, which is due to the rise of the internet and new technologies, allowing younger generations to be part of social causes.

2.1.5.4.2 Key Movement: "Me Too"

This fourth wave has been promoted by activist Tarana Burke with the "Me Too" movement, as the National Women's History Museum (2021) explains that during her time as director of a youth camp, Burke was approached by a young girl who confided in her about having experienced sexual abuse. As someone who had also gone through that trauma, Burke felt an instant connection with her. In that

moment, the only words that came to her mind were “Me Too.” That interaction was the impulse for her to later come up with a campaign in 2007 for that movement.

In the following years, she developed this movement, and in 2017, this movement skyrocketed. And why? Well, the popularity of this movement was due to a Hollywood scandal; it became known that a producer, Harvey Weinstein, had been a sexual predator for years and had assaulted tons of victims and had not been incarcerated. This was the key moment for social media, and victims started speaking up for their rights.

2.1.5.4.3 Principles of the Fourth Wave of Feminism

This fourth wave of Feminism has been characterized by having some strong beliefs and principles. An article written by Masterclass (2022) states that the principles are:

2.1.5.4.3.1 Intersectionality

Third-wave feminists highlighted the relevance of intersectionality, and many advocates within the fourth wave have continued to develop and broaden this concept. The pursuit of gender equality and social justice becomes more meaningful when it includes the experiences of women of color and the multiple layers of oppression they face. Gender-based violence tends to be more severe and widespread when intersecting with other factors such as race, class, and sexual identity.

2.1.5.4.3.2 Internationalism

While the wave framework of feminism originated in the Western context, feminist efforts in other parts of the world were often overlooked in academic and public discourse. Fourth-wave feminism aims to address this imbalance by amplifying the perspectives of historically marginalized communities, particularly those resisting patriarchal structures on a global scale.

2.1.5.4.3.3 Solidarity

Fourth-wave feminism promotes solidarity that transcends differences in age, race, belief systems, and gender identities. Similar to the third wave, many fourth-wave feminists view capitalism, especially in its neoliberal form, as both a root cause and an accelerator of various forms of oppression.

2.1.5.4.3.4 Decentralization

The rise of digital platforms has created new possibilities for feminist organizing and activism. Through the Internet, individuals are able to hold powerful figures accountable, providing marginalized women with tools to seek justice and reclaim agency. The fourth wave has exposed numerous cases of sexual violence perpetrated by men in sectors such as politics, business, entertainment, and digital media.

2.1.5.4.5 Examples of Activists and Voices of the Fourth Wave

Fourth-wave feminism has been shaped by the work of various activists whose contributions reflect the movement's core values. Tarana Burke initiated the "Me Too" movement to raise awareness about sexual violence, particularly against women of color. Emma Watson promoted gender equality through the "HeForShe" campaign, engaging men as allies. Malala Yousafzai became a global symbol of girls' right to education in the face of patriarchal violence. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie brought intersectionality into mainstream feminist discourse through her widely circulated talks and writings. Brittany Packnett Cunningham has connected feminist activism with racial justice. Amanda Nguyen successfully advocated for the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights, showing how activism can lead to legal reform. Laverne Cox, through her advocacy and visibility, has expanded feminist conversations to include trans rights. Together, these voices exemplify the diversity, reach, and impact of the fourth wave.

Hence, the fourth wave of Feminism represents a significant moment in the ongoing fight for gender equality. It is shaped by the influence of digital technology, the leadership of young activists, and the growing visibility of issues related to sexual violence and social justice. Movements like "Me Too" have played a crucial role in encouraging victims to speak up, while the principles of intersectionality, internationalism, solidarity, and decentralization reflect the wave's more inclusive goals. As it continues to develop, the fourth wave of Feminism strengthens the voice of those who have historically been silenced, reinforcing the importance of collective action in the pursuit of lasting change.

2.1.6 Types of Feminism

When talking about Feminism, it is necessary to mention that as an ideology, it has different

branches. This paper will discuss seven of them: Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Ecofeminism, Liberal Feminism, Cultural Feminism, Intersectional Feminism, and Black Feminism.

2.1.6.1 Marxist Feminism

2.1.6.1.1 Definition

The first type of feminism in the discussion is Marxist Feminism. The first wave of Marxist Feminism emerged in 1910 when the first Marxist Feminists joined the workforce and started the movement. This type of Feminism comes from the ideology of “Marxism” proposed by the German philosopher Karl Marx, in which he demonstrated how capitalism grew through labor exploitation. This theory states that women's oppression is caused by the different economic systems and how capitalism benefits from patriarchal structures. In other words, it means that the main cause of women’s oppression is capitalism. According to Guy (2024), Marxist Feminists see capitalism and patriarchy as equal systems that work together; they think capitalism equals unpaid domestic labor for women, perpetuating the power of men in society.

In literature, Marxist Feminism examines how female characters are usually tied to following social norms, social status, and economic independence.

The idea of women having underpaid jobs and depending economically on men is a topic seen in *Lessons in Chemistry*, as the story is set in a time when it was very common for women to dedicate themselves to their families and nothing else. This stereotype perpetuates the central idea of Marxist Feminism, which talks about the oppression of women through capitalism and how women from different social classes have different views of life and are affected differently by one or another.

2.1.6.1.2 Goals

The goal of Marxist Feminism is to empower women through the restructuring of the social and economic conditions that sustain their oppression and exploitation.

2.1.6.1.3 Principles

On the other hand, the principles of this type of Feminism are clear: Women reproduce the labor

force, Women oversee unpaid domestic care, Women are the solution for cheap labor, and emotional labor often falls on women, reinforcing gendered expectations.

2.1.6.1.4 Key Figures

Throughout history, there have been a couple of women who stood up and raised their voices for those who were unable to do so. Andersen et al. (n.d) added that Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an example of Marxist Feminism in the first wave, as were Mary Harris Jones and Alexandra Kollontai. Therefore, Marxist Feminism offers a critical perspective on how economic systems and patriarchal structures combine to oppress women. It highlights the role of capitalism in maintaining gender inequality through unpaid domestic labor, economic dependence, and social expectations. This framework helps to understand the diverse experiences of women across different social classes and how literature, such as *Lessons in Chemistry*, reflects these realities. The movement's goal of transforming social and economic conditions remains relevant today, as it continues to inspire efforts to challenge both economic exploitation and gender-based oppression. Historical figures who supported these ideas laid the foundation for ongoing feminist activism focused on systemic change.

2.1.6.2 Radical Feminism

2.1.6.2.2 Definition

Radical Feminism is a branch of Feminism that started in 1968 during the second wave of Feminism. The promoters of this type of Feminism were a group called the "New York Radical Women." Radical Feminism, as defined by Johnson (2024), is a philosophy that argues that the primary cause of gender inequity lies in the patriarchal system, where men hold power and systematically oppress women. The reason why "Radical" is used is because radical feminists tend to be more "militant" when talking about their interests and the things they fight for. In this type of Feminism, the patriarchy is abolished and aims for a reorganization of societal rules. It is also inspired by Marxism and the thought of fighting against injustices and getting to the root of them. For example, the oppression of women.

2.1.6.2.2 Goals

But what are the goals of Radical Feminism? Well, as Guy (2024) adds, the goals of radical feminism are the elimination of patriarchal systems that contribute to the isolation of women in society, contributing to gender inequality, restructuring traditional families and gender roles, and prioritizing women's rights when it comes to birth control and living free of domestic violence.

2.1.6.2.3 Principles

On the other hand, the principles for this type of Feminism, as Johnson (2024) explains, are the following: to ensure reproductive rights for every woman, their right to decide if they want to carry a pregnancy to term, have an abortion, use birth control, or get sterilized. To analyze and break down traditional gender roles in personal relationships and public environments. To understand rape as an expression of patriarchal power rather than a pursuit of sexual desire. And finally, to challenge traditional notions of motherhood, marriage, family structure, and sexuality by examining how deeply they are influenced by patriarchal ideologies.

2.1.6.2.4 Key Figures

Finally, it is necessary to mention a couple of examples of Radical Feminists, who are: Simone Weil, Stormé DeLarverie, and Ceija Stojka. In the long run, Radical Feminism presents a transformative approach that seeks to break down patriarchal structures at their core. By challenging traditional family roles, societal norms, and the power dynamics that oppress women, it aims to create a society where women have full autonomy over their bodies and lives. Its militant stance reflects the urgency and depth of change that radical feminists believe is necessary to achieve true gender equality. The principles and goals of this movement emphasize not only legal rights but also a profound cultural shift in how gender and power are understood. Historical figures associated with Radical Feminism demonstrate the enduring impact of this philosophy in advocating women's liberation from systemic oppression.

2.1.6.3 Ecofeminism

2.1.6.3.1 Definition

The following type of Feminism is called Ecofeminism. The first time this term was used was in the decade of the 1970s by a French writer named Françoise d'Eaubonne. The definition for this type of Feminism is a little bit tricky, but Bove (2021) defines the term as follows: Ecofeminism aims to reassess and enhance the ideas presented by both feminism and environmentalism. It explores the connections between gender and the natural world, focusing on how binary distinctions often misrepresent reality, leading to unequal value systems and reinforcing hierarchical structures.

2.1.6.3.2 Goals

Among the goals of Ecofeminism, its militants and Bindal (2021) state that Child marriage and genital mutilation must be abolished. Guarantee equal access for all individuals to reproductive health care services and comprehensive sexual education, ensuring the fulfillment of fundamental health and human rights. Women's and girls' rights must be protected at all costs. Minimize gender disparities in educational opportunities based on gender and ensure inclusive, equitable access to quality education for all. Increase women's economic opportunities and give them power over their bodies. And finally, reduce unpaid domestic responsibilities for women and girls.

2.1.6.3.3 Principles

On the other hand, Ecofeminism has five different principles. According to Regan (2020), they include: The oppression of marginalized groups and the exploitation of nature stems from a shared root cause. Society should transition from dominance-based systems to ones that prioritize care and compassion. Every form of oppression is intolerable and linked through shared systems of power. Recognizing these interconnections is essential to achieving meaningful and equitable transformation. And finally, the movement should be led by individuals and groups who bear the greatest burden of environmental destruction.

2.1.6.3.4 Key Figures

Finally, it is necessary to add examples of Ecofeminism. One such example is the Chipko Andolan movement in India, which was a conservation movement led by Indigenous women who were affected by deforestation in the 1970s.

Ecofeminism offers a unique perspective by linking the oppression of women with the exploitation of the environment, emphasizing that both stem from interconnected systems of power and dominance. This approach highlights the need for societal change towards compassion, care, and equality, addressing not only gender injustice but also environmental degradation. The movement's goals reflect a broad vision that includes abolishing harmful practices, ensuring equal access to education and healthcare, and reducing the unpaid labor burden on women. Historical examples like the Chipko Andolan movement demonstrate how ecofeminist principles have inspired real-world activism led by those most affected by both social and environmental injustices. Ecofeminism continues to contribute important insights to feminist theory and environmental advocacy alike.

2.1.6.4 Liberal Feminism

2.1.6.4.1 Definition

Liberal feminism is another type of Feminism that emerged in Western countries in the 17th and 18th centuries. Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill were pioneers of this branch of Feminism. Liberal Feminism is a political philosophy that advocates for women's legal and political rights. Liberal Feminists claim that women's oppression lies in their lack of access to political and legal rights.

2.1.6.4.2 Goals

Among the goals of Liberal Feminism, according to Guy (2024), are equal participation in public life and equal rights in private spaces (such as home or with family).

2.1.6.4.3 Principles

On the other hand, when talking about principles, they are gender equality, equality in women's representation, and reforming the system. It is an individualistic theory instead of being group-based.

Liberal Feminists are known for popularizing the concept of sexism.

2.1.6.4.4 Key Figures

Finally, the famous militants of Liberal Feminism are the following: Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Carol Gilligan.

As a result, Liberal Feminism focuses on achieving gender equality through legal and political reforms, emphasizing the importance of equal rights and representation in both public and private spheres. Rooted in individual rights and freedoms, this branch of feminism advocates for systemic change that allows women to participate fully in society. The movement has played a key role in popularizing concepts such as sexism and continues to influence contemporary debates on gender equality. Prominent figures associated with Liberal Feminism have contributed significantly to advancing women's rights through activism and scholarship, shaping the ongoing struggle for equal treatment under the law.

2.1.6.5 Cultural Feminism

2.1.6.5.1 Definition

Cultural Feminism is the next type of Feminism to be researched. Cultural Feminism emerged in the 1970s as a response to Radical Feminism. Brooke Williams was the first person to establish this theory against Radical Feminism. Cultural Feminism, as defined by Masterclass (2023), comes from the idea that women possess an essence or nature that makes them different from men. In some interpretations, this difference offers societal advantages. Cultural Feminists claim that women's perspectives should be taken more into account, and that is the reason they are usually mistreated in society.

2.1.6.5.2 Goals

As Johnson (2025) writes, cultural feminism's goals include recognizing the value of traditionally "female" jobs, such as parenting, valuing domestic childcare in the home, and providing a livable salary to stay-at-home mothers. Appreciating traits typically associated with femininity, such as care and nurturing. Striving to correct a culture that prioritizes traditionally "masculine" traits like

aggression, while neglecting values like compassion and gentleness. Establishing rape crisis centers and women's shelters, often in collaboration with feminists from other perspectives. And finally, focusing on the common values shared among women across racial and cultural groups, such as white, African American, and others, rather than emphasizing their differences.

2.1.6.5.3 Principles

On the other hand, there are four principles of cultural feminism, and as Masterclass (2023) states, they are the following:

2.1.6.5.3.1 Essentialism:

This branch of Feminism highlights essentialist beliefs that men and women are not equal, but their differences make them unique. Women's nature is highly valuable, but male oppression makes them suppress their natural talents and abilities.

2.1.6.5.3.2 Separatism

It advocates for the creation of exclusively female spaces, allowing women to thrive in spaces targeted only for women, safe spaces free from male presence.

2.1.6.5.3.3 Female nature defines their culture

Cultural Feminism considers that women's culture may arise from biology or society. That is the reason why women are often characterized as gentler and more peaceful, meaning that they would make better leaders. Additionally, women are believed to have a deeper connection with nature, which positions them as more capable of making environmentally conscious decisions and considering the long-term implications for humanity.

2.1.6.5.3.4 "Weakness" as a strength

Cultural Feminism works on redefining the popular assumption of women as the "weaker" gender.

2.1.6.5.4 Key Figures

Finally, among the examples of Cultural Feminists are Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Marilyn

French, and Adrienne Rich. Cultural Feminism emphasizes the unique qualities and values traditionally associated with women, advocating for their recognition and appreciation in society. By highlighting differences rather than insisting on sameness, this branch challenges cultural norms that have historically marginalized women's experiences and contributions. Its principles promote the creation of safe, women-centered spaces and seek to redefine perceived weaknesses as strengths. From this perspective, Cultural Feminism advocates for a cultural shift that prioritizes compassion, nurturing, and a connection with nature, presenting an alternative vision of leadership and social organization. The work of notable cultural feminists has been instrumental in advancing these ideas and enriching feminist thought as a whole.

2.1.6.6 Intersectional Feminism

2.1.6.6.1 Definition

Moving on to the following type of Feminism, there is Intersectional Feminism, which emerged in the 1980s. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw promoted this type of Feminism, although she was not the first one researching this topic. According to an article written by Soken (n.d), Intersectional Feminism is defined as an approach that acknowledges how multiple forms of oppression, such as those based on race, class, ability, and sexuality, intersect and shape people's experiences in different ways. Unlike mainstream feminism, which tends to focus primarily on gender or sex, intersectional feminism highlights the interconnected nature of these systems of discrimination.

2.1.6.6.2 Goals

On the other hand, the goals of Intersectional Feminism, as examined by UN Women (2025), are the following: recognizing intersecting oppressions, promoting inclusive participation, challenging power structures, developing context-sensitive solutions, and ensuring equitable access to resources.

2.1.6.6.3 Principles

In addition to the goals, it is also necessary to mention the principles to which CRIAW (2021) adds. A core principle of feminist intersectionality is that different types of oppression can coexist and

impact certain women simultaneously. This principle highlights the importance of considering multiple aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, and ability, when analyzing social inequalities. It acknowledges that experiences of discrimination are not isolated but interconnected, shaping the realities of those affected in complex ways. Understanding these interconnections is essential to creating more inclusive and effective approaches to social justice.

2.1.6.6.4 Key Figures

Among the examples of Intersectional Feminists are Valdecir Nascimento, Sonia Maribel Sontay Herrera, and Anne Heloise Barbosa. In the long run, Intersectional Feminism represents a necessary perspective within the feminist movement, as it allows for a broader and more realistic understanding of inequality. By considering how different forms of oppression intersect, this approach not only deepens the analysis of social issues but also proposes more inclusive and context-sensitive solutions. Both its goals and principles make it clear that, to achieve true social justice, it is essential to recognize the multiple dimensions that shape each individual's identity.

2.1.6.7 Black Feminism

2.1.6.7.1 Definition

The following type of Feminism is Black Feminism, which first emerged in 1851 by Sojourner Truth, a former slave and civil rights activist. Black Feminism is defined as a political and social movement that aims to fight for black women's rights. Black Feminism is differentiated from traditional Feminism because historically, black women have had a harder path than white women, especially in the United States, due to slavery and unpaid labor.

2.1.6.7.2 Goals

The principal goals of Black Feminism are very easy: to have more black women in higher positions in important corporations, letting black women's voices be heard when talking about basic human rights, such as public healthcare and abortion. Transformation of institutional power and global justice, and collective freedom.

2.1.6.7.3 Principles

On the other hand, the principles of Black Feminism, as defined by Masterclass (2022), are the following:

2.1.6.7.3.1 Global awareness:

Black feminists emphasize the need to advocate for the freedom of Black women around the world, not only those in the United States. Their objectives focus on securing justice for women of color and BIPOC women, regardless of whether they live in developed or developing countries.

2.1.6.7.3.2 Identity politics:

Black feminism is grounded in the understanding that everyone may face different forms of injustice or privilege depending on their identity. While white feminists might deal with sexism and Black men with racism, neither group experiences the form of oppression that arises from the intersection of both, something that only affects Black women.

2.1.6.7.3.3 Intersectionality:

Injustice and oppression function as a complex and interconnected system. Forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism often intersect, affecting individuals in unique and specific ways. Black feminism adopts an intersectional perspective, striving to address and eliminate all forms of inequality and systemic harm.

2.1.6.7.4 Key Figures

Finally, among the examples of Black Feminists are Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and the previously mentioned Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Hence, Black Feminism stands as a necessary and powerful movement that addresses the specific struggles faced by Black women throughout history and in contemporary society. By setting clear goals and upholding essential principles, it highlights the importance of visibility, representation, and justice for those who have long been silenced or overlooked. Through its intersectional lens, Black Feminism continues to challenge systems of oppression and advocate for lasting change, not only for Black women

but for all marginalized communities.

2.1.6.8 Black Feminism vs White Feminism

On another note, it is essential to acknowledge and highlight the differences between Black feminism and White feminism. Feminism is a movement that throughout history has been characterized by fighting to defend women's rights, but also by having mostly white militants, which can be due to different reasons. Feminism, white or black, both fight for the same ideals: women's liberation, overthrowing the patriarchy, and promoting a safer society for the younger generations of women. Still, somehow, there is some segregation in Feminism; some people believe that, throughout history, some Black Feminist achievements may have been silenced, or sometimes issues that Black women face are not considered in Feminism. According to Niguel (2022), one reason for this is that feminist movements have historically centered and often still center on issues primarily impacting white women, frequently overlooking the intersection of race and gender. These movements have also failed to adequately address the specific challenges faced by Black women, who are disproportionately subjected to police violence, including sexual assault. Studies have shown that Black women endure significantly higher rates of domestic and sexual abuse by partners compared to white women, yet they are less likely to report such incidents.

On the other hand, as stated by Cox (2023), in the 1970s, Black women criticized the Feminist movement for being focused on the struggles of middle-class White women. While many white feminists advocated for liberation from domestic roles, Black women were not on the same page, as in history, Black enslaved women had already been part of the workforce as maids and farmers.

In conclusion, while both Black Feminism and White Feminism aim to achieve equality and justice for women, it is important to recognize that their struggles and perspectives have not always been the same. The historical exclusion of Black women's experiences and contributions has created a divide within the movement that still resonates today. Acknowledging these differences is not about creating

separation but about ensuring that all voices are heard and all realities are taken into account in the fight for gender equality.

2.1.7 Other Exponents of Feminism in Literature

2.1.7.1 Bell Hooks

Among the other exponents of this theory are Bell Hooks, Judith Butler, and Simone de Beauvoir. The first focus will be on Gloria Jean Watkins, or her artistic name, bell hooks. Born on September 25, 1952, in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, she was a black writer, feminist, cultural critic, and social activist. As well as Elaine Showalter, who had a strong opinion of feminism as a literary theory, as Tionloc (2020) states, she challenged the dominant feminist narratives of her era by highlighting both the absence of a clear, unified definition of feminism and the overwhelming influence of white, privileged women within the movement. (p. 13). She is regarded as one of the few black feminist women to raise her voice during such a difficult time for women, no matter their skin color. It is not a secret that black people have always been a minority, and it seems like, not even in this situation, colorism was out of the picture.

2.1.7.2 Judith Butler

The following expositor of the feminist theory is Judith Butler, born on February 24, 1956, in Cleveland, Ohio. She is a feminist philosopher known for her academic studies on gender, feminist, and queer theory. She goes by the they/them pronouns. Her contribution to feminism as a literary theory, as mentioned by Singisala (2023), is that she rejects identity politics and instead proposes a renewed, inclusive feminism that critically examines the underlying assumptions of both gender and identity. In this view, sex is understood as a biological characteristic, while gender is seen as a socially and culturally constructed concept. (p. 126) This conceptualization has been fundamental in challenging traditional binary categories of gender, allowing for a more fluid and diverse understanding that acknowledges the multiplicity of identities and experiences. In doing so, Butler not only challenges the foundations of conventional feminism but also opens space for new forms of inclusion and resistance against normative

power structures.

2.1.7.3 Simone de Beauvoir

The fourth and last exponent of this theory is Simone de Beauvoir, born on January 09, 1908, in Paris, France, she was a French philosopher, writer, and feminist activist, her most known example of feminism as a literary theory comes from her book “The Second Sex” 1949, in which Adams, (2020) says that “The book, in a fashion ahead of its time, recognizes the male as the default and the female as the “other.” Beauvoir highlights the male domination of women and rejects ideas of those such as Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Engels”. This example helps us to see the role of women in literature in that period, how some of them were not happy with the roles that society had given them, and how they wanted a change. (para. 05)

This approach allows for an analysis and a connection between literature and the main character, Elizabeth Zott, and how she had to fight against gender stereotypes in the 1950s and 1960s, during the fact that, she was not only a woman, but also a woman that wanted to succeed in a “man’s field”, in this case, her investigation in Hastings Research Institute, not having enough with that, she didn’t want to fulfill the role of stay at home mother that society at that time had given to her either, she wanted to be independent and not let any man made her feel like a dumb person.

2.1.8 Author’s Biography: Bonnie Garmus

To wrap up a little bit with the exponents of feminism as a literary theory, it is important to mention the author of *Lessons in Chemistry*, Bonnie Garmus. She is an American copywriter whose book reporter (n.d) says she has extensive experience in the fields of technology, medicine, and education. In addition to her career, she engages in open-water swimming and rowing and is the mother of two accomplished daughters. In the comment section of an online page, she says that her inspiration for writing *Lessons in Chemistry* was the fact that she had previously worked in a male-dominated environment, and just like her character, Elizabeth Zott, she faced a significant amount of sexism just for being a woman.

This New York Times bestseller, published in 2022, has captivated millions. The book has been translated into more than forty languages. Due to the author's writing style and ability to catch the readers' attention, with her unique characters, the combination of humor, social critique, and the strong feminist message she comes with, it is no surprise that everyone loves it. In 2023, Apple+ adapted the book to a TV series and, just like the book, it had major success all around the world.

2.2 Historical and social context of women in the 50's and 60's

2.2.1 Gender roles

The following point of this theoretical framework focuses on the historical and social context of women in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, women used to be treated like objects or “baby-making machines,” building the idea that they were not intelligent or capable of getting a degree or working for an important company; they were expected to be housewives and very much not have their thoughts and dreams beyond being a mother and raising children. Also, society had very high expectations in terms of marriage and starting a family; for them, the appropriate age was when women were 20 and between 22 and 23 for men. This created an unrealistic expectation of life because, first, who was ready to marry that young? And second, it made older women feel like their time was up just because they were not married or had kids already, as it happens in *Lessons in Chemistry* with Elizabeth Zott, she did not want to get married, and when her boyfriend Calvin Evans proposed to her, she declined that offer because she thought her potential was bigger for just staying at home raising children and being just “some man’s” wife (although Calvin was not “some man”, he was pretty big in the scientist world) people used to make her feel bad about her decision, and when Calvin died and she found out she was pregnant, she got a lot more criticized.

That is another point, in that decade being a single mother was seen as a bad thing, but luckily, Elizabeth was very strong with her decisions and thoughts. Women were very restricted in the past, they also had very limited in terms of education and job opportunities, again, using the example of Elizabeth Zott in *Lessons in Chemistry* where the reader get to see how hard was for her to be able to study, whether

it was because of gender roles, a man trying to assault her or just because of her position as a woman in a male-dominated space.

2.2.2 Family Life

Moreover, post-World War 2, the economy started to get better, and people started to see life differently and understood the value of family. Concordia University, St Paul (2020) states that.

This period saw younger marriages, more kids, and fewer divorces. The average age for women to marry was 20, divorce rates stabilized, and the birth rate doubled. However, the perfect images of family life that appeared on television do not tell the whole story: “Only 60 percent of children spent their childhood in a male-breadwinner, female-homemaker household.” (para. 09)

Despite the widespread portrayal of the ideal nuclear family as a male breadwinner and a female homemaker, this model did not represent the reality for all families. A significant number of children grew up in different types of households, reflecting the diversity of family structures that existed. Economic demands and changing social roles began to influence family dynamics, with more women starting to participate in the workforce and taking on roles beyond traditional domestic responsibilities.

Finally, the postwar era brought shifts in cultural attitudes towards parenting and child development, emphasizing nurturing and education as essential aspects of family life. While the period is often remembered for its emphasis on family unity and traditional roles, it also laid the groundwork for social changes that would become more apparent in later decades, including evolving gender roles and increasing family diversity.

2.2.3 World War 2

World War 2 was an armed conflict that happened between 1939 and 1945, and the countries in dispute were divided into different categories: the Allies, with major powers such as the United States, the Soviet Union (USSR), the United Kingdom, China, and France. On the other hand, we have the Axis Powers, with major powers of countries like Germany, Italy, and Japan. This was a long war, so it is kind of difficult to talk about everything that happened, but to summarize it, Vergun (2020) explains that

World War II included participants from most of the world's countries and is recognized as the deadliest conflict in history. Approximately 85 million soldiers and civilians lost their lives. The war concluded on September 2, 1945, when Japanese officials formally signed the surrender documents aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Japan.

This global conflict drastically reshaped international relations and the geopolitical landscape. The aftermath led to the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers, setting the stage for the Cold War era. Additionally, the war accelerated technological and medical advancements while causing widespread social and economic disruption. It also prompted the establishment of international organizations, such as the United Nations, aimed at preventing future large-scale conflicts and promoting global cooperation. The profound consequences of World War II continue to influence global politics and society to this day.

2.2.4 The Cold War

Right after World War 2 had ended, another war started because of ideological and political differences between the United States and the Soviet Union. It began in 1945 and ended through the years of the 1960s and 1970s. According to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (2021), Soldiers from both the United States and the Soviet Union did not battle directly; instead, they mortified each other through political propaganda, military coalitions, espionage, and economic aid.

The Cold War was a prolonged period of tension that went beyond military strategy and politics. It influenced the daily lives of people through fear, propaganda, and the promotion of specific values by both superpowers. These changes affected not only international relations but also internal social dynamics, including family roles, education, and gender expectations, which would eventually contribute to broader social movements and demands for equality in the following decades.

2.2.5 Women's Rights

The introduction of the birth control pill was equal to another struggle for women; the main advocate for this right was Margaret Sanger, but she was rejected many times. She opened the first birth

control clinic in Brooklyn, New York, in 1916, but was arrested for distributing illegal medicine. Once World War II ended, there was a shift in society's perspective on this topic; the room for negotiation was open again, and more women started to advocate for this cause, which Cannato (n.d) states:

In the early 1950s, Sanger convinced her friend Katherine McCormack, a long-time women's rights activist and wealthy philanthropist, to help fund the research of Massachusetts scientist Gregory Pincus, who was working on fertility issues. In his research, Pincus began to experiment with oral hormonal contraceptives that would prevent ovulation in women. (para. 08)

This period marked a turning point in the broader movement for women's reproductive rights, as increasing numbers of women began to demand greater control over their bodies and lives. The activism surrounding birth control reflected deeper social changes, including challenges to traditional gender roles and growing calls for equality. These early efforts laid the groundwork for later advancements, shaping public opinion and policy in ways that would continue to evolve in the decades that followed.

2.2.5.1 The Birth Control Pill

The introduction of the birth control pill was another win for women in the 50s and 60s. Although being a woman at that time was still difficult, a win is a win. On the other hand, that victory was one step further in a transformation era, in which, women were able to choose if they wanted to have children or not, although probably the women who decided to try the pill were heavily criticized, as it was still a pretty patriarchal society, examples like the one in *Lessons in Chemistry* where we have Elizabeth Zott as a strong woman who wanted to dedicate her life to science instead of turning into a wife and a mom, shows how the invention of the birth control pill allowed other women with the same ideals as Elizabeth to postpone the societal expectation of being mothers to a couple more years until they felt ready and happy with the things they had achieved in life, rather than becoming mothers young and left with un-lived dreams.

2.2.5.2 Women's Rights/ Equal Pay

The fight for women's rights continued in the 1960s with the women's battle on equal pay, as

they were being paid less than their male counterparts in the same workplace and doing the same labor. This “discrimination” was due to the thought of the gender roles imposed at that time; the minimal pay and the lack of rights were pushing women to go back to domestic labor and leaving their aspirations behind. Thus, Bailey, Helgerman, and Stuart (2022) state that “In the 1960s, two landmark statutes—the Equal Pay and Civil Rights Acts—targeted the long-standing practice of employment discrimination against U.S. women.” (p. 01) This topic relates to *Lessons in Chemistry* because of how, although society was changing, women were still seen as inferiors, as in the case of Elizabeth Zott and everything that happened to her while she worked at Hastings, people liked to say that she was just a secretary, or that she was with Calvin Evans just because he was a successful scientist. Not only that, but an eye-opening situation in the novel happens when Elizabeth finds out she is pregnant with her daughter. By the time she goes with Donatti to explain her situation, she gets fired without a valid reason. This situation reflects the lack of rights women had in their workplaces.

2.2.5.3 Women’s Rights/ The Civil Rights Act

On the other hand, the Civil Rights Act came in handy with the equal pay, as it helped women avoid workplace inequality, forcing employers to equally pay their workers, no matter if they were women, men, black, or white, Fisher and Johnson (2022) mention that “The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, color, or national origin in public places, schools, and employment. However, discrimination based on sex was not initially included in the proposed bill” (para. 01) Sadly, by the time *Lessons in Chemistry* was set this law did not exist yet, which is why Elizabeth kept being discriminated no matter how much she tried to avoid it, but it is important that, thanks to stories like Elizabeth Zott’s (although is fiction) American women woke up and decided it was time for a change. Furthermore, it is necessary to mention that a law was and is not enough to change what society thinks, that is why, modern women and women in the 50s and 60s still have to fight against stereotypes, or we still see how difficult it is for a woman to have a high position in a company and how these charges are still occupied by a man.

2.3 The struggle of women in science

2.3.1 Historical difficulties of women in science

The third point to analyze, is the struggle of women in science, and historically, women in science have faced numerous difficulties, as mentioned previously, men wanted them to stay at home and raise kids, but also I think they felt jealous because they thought a more intelligent woman would take their places, whether in their workplace and as providers, as we see in *Lessons in Chemistry* Elizabeth was, in fact, more intelligent than her boss, Mr. Donatti, who ended up stealing her investigation in abiogenesis, and given himself all the credit. Not only him, but during the time Elizabeth was unemployed, a couple of her old colleagues paid her for helping them with the results of their investigation and not giving her the credit she deserved. On the other hand, and associating this with the book, women in the past were often denied educational opportunities, research funding, and professional opportunities, such as what happened to Elizabeth Zott in the novel when the funding for her research in abiogenesis was cut.

2.3.2 Real-life examples

2.3.2.1 Rosalind Franklin

Historically, there is the example of Rosalind Franklin, a British physical chemist expert in crystallography and a pioneer in the discovery of DNA structures. She did her research at King's College London in the early 1950s, and believe it or not, women were forced to work isolated from male investigators. She was such a strong woman, as well as Elizabeth Zott; she was persistent and determined with her investigation and her place in a male-dominated field. In 1950, Rosalind was given a three-year fellowship at King's College in London, where the discrimination got higher. Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science (n.d) adds that Dr. Franklin encountered significant challenges in a work environment that was often unwelcoming and, at times, openly hostile. She likely perceived elements of both anti-Semitism and sexism, and her contributions were reportedly undervalued by some colleagues, as noted by a scientist interviewed by her biographer, Brenda Maddox. Lacking a formal

academic appointment or rank, she faced obstacles to effective collaboration and communication since day one of working at the institution.

2.3.2 Other important chemists

Along with Rosalind Franklin, other women in science had to face discrimination to be successful and to get the recognition their work required; among them are Marie Curie, Marie Tharp, and Lise Meitner.

2.3.2.2 Marie Curie

She was born on 7 November 1867 in Warsaw, Poland, and was the youngest of five children. She was famous because, along with her husband, Pierre Curie, she discovered the periodical elements of polonium and radium, and was a pioneer in the study of radioactivity. When talking about her struggles as a woman in science, Moskowitz (2024) adds that:

She was operating in this environment of huge sexism. She was barred from the French Academy of Sciences. Even though she had a lot of support, they did not vote her in, and to be published in their weekly proceedings, to present your work, you had to be a member. So she was constantly having to ask friends to present the work of the people in her lab, which was an enormous embarrassment. She was the premier authority on her subject, and she didn't have the standing in the professional community that she deserved. And then later her daughter tried several times to get voted into the academy. She was also a Nobel Prize winner, and she couldn't get in, either.

(para. 12)

An interesting fact about Marie is that she encouraged the women who were working with her in the laboratory to follow the same path as her, in this case, to do their research. Likewise, in *Lessons in Chemistry*, Marie Curie was married to another successful chemist, Pierre Curie even though, as in the novel, people at the time thought Marie was just Pierre's assistant, just like Elizabeth and Calvin whereas most of the scientists of the lab did not believe in Elizabeth's work and were overshadowed by her partner.

2.3.2.3 Marie Tharp

Born on July 30, 1920, in Ypsilanti, Michigan. She was an oceanographer and geologist who created some of the first maps of the ocean floor. Her struggles started when she began working for Bruce Heezen. Although she had experience in geology, she couldn't do the work her male counterpart did.

Khan (2021) establishes that:

Being a woman, Marie was not allowed to go on ships (since having women onboard was considered an ill omen), so Bruce went on explorations of the Atlantic Ocean, collecting echo sound recording data (a kind of sonar technique) that measured the depth of the sea. The readings were sent to Marie, who had the arduous task of reconstructing the relief of the ocean floor through careful interpretation from reels of paper. She would first convert it into 2-dimensional maps, and then superimpose it with the longitude and latitude information of the region to complete a 3-dimensional picture. (para. 11)

As you would probably expect, due to the patriarchy imposed in that era, Bruce discarded her findings and calculations, saying that they were "girl talk". He rejected her conclusions, but she was not over; she followed along with her research and ended up proving that her point was right. In 1957, they published the results of their research called "The Floors of the Oceans: I. The North Atlantic".

2.3.2.4 Lise Meitner

She was born on November 7, 1878, in Vienna, Austria-Hungary. She was famous because she discovered the radioactive element protactinium and was the first to describe and coin the term "nuclear fission" in a scientific paper. Fraser (2021) mentions that as a woman of Jewish heritage working in a male-dominated environment, Meitner experienced multiple forms of discrimination, including anti-Semitism and sexism barriers that most of her peers did not face. These intersecting challenges played a significant role in her exclusion from the Nobel Prize.

By the end of her career, she continued her work in Sweden, became a celebrity in the scientific community, and traveled around the world.

The story of Rosalind Franklin, Marie Curie, Marie Tharp, and Lise Meitner serves as an example of how difficult was to be a woman in science in the 50s and '60s, the same happened to Elizabeth, Rosalind Franklin's co-workers did not believe in her or her investigations, she had trouble communicating with the rest of the investigators, made her work seem less important than it was and wanted to take advantage of her findings, her male coworkers decided to work together and left her alone. Sadly, that is how we can see how men did not believe in or like having women working with them in the laboratories, and sadly, Miss Franklin's work was overshadowed by her male counterparts.

2.4 The contemporary narrative of the #Tradwives movement

2.4.1 Definition and origin of the movement

The following point of this theoretical framework is about the contemporary narrative of the #Tradwives movement, which goes way contrary to the definition of feminism, this trend, aims for women to go back to being “stay-at-home moms”, and wait for men to be the providers and bring back all of those values our grandmothers had in the past. Far from being a sign of progress for modern women, it is taking them back to a society millions of women fought to erase. But when did this movement begin? The first time the term was used was in 2020. Kaur (2022) mentions that the tradwife discourse continued to grow in 2022, as tradwife-related content expanded across social media platforms and was subsequently amplified through media coverage of the trend.

2.4.2 Social media influence in young women

The importance that people have given to social media and content creators is insane, imagine a world where women decide to go back to the “traditional values” just because they saw it on social media, this is insane, not only because that would result in stopping the progress society has made, but because probably, none of these women who are aiming to “go back in time” experience being a young woman forced to get married and leave out their aspirations behind because of societal expectations. Also, this movement is heavily influenced by apps like Instagram. Due to their pink, soft, and feminine "aesthetic," influencers of this movement show.

2.4.3 Contrast of this trend with feminism

It can be argued that modern women should be able to decide if they want to study and get a degree, or stay at home and be a stay-at-home mother, obviously, not letting go of feminist ideals. This consideration introduces another point to analyze, and it is the relationship between the “tradwife” movement and the feminist ideals, in which Campion and Ingram (2023) say that:

One prominent far-right tradwife claims feminist domination has resulted in the repression of men who are tired of being shamed for their masculinity.

Those who do not conform to the feminine ideal are seen as unnatural, racial traitors or enemies. (para. 22)

But what does this discourse say about modern feminism? As it was stated previously in this research, the “#Tradwife” movement aims to go back to traditional values. This, going against feminist aims, Liporace (2024) mentions in her article that “The tradwife movement, by contrast, glorifies a return to roles that feminism has historically critiqued for their inherent limitations and constraints. By romanticizing domestic submission, tradwives inadvertently support a vision of femininity that contradicts empowerment and self-determination.” (para. 03)

This is how, guided by social media platforms, a lack of individual thinking, and the need for validation from other people, our society could be encountering a new era of traditional values and a stereotypical society. Many of the issues that generations of women fought against are having a comeback, and like every era, women will have to fight to fix them.

In conclusion, the contemporary #Tradwives movement presents a narrative that challenges the progress made by feminist ideals. Rooted in a desire to return to traditional gender roles, it is heavily influenced by social media and a nostalgic aesthetic that appeals to many young women. While the choice to prioritize family life should be respected, the movement’s romanticization of domestic submission contradicts the principles of empowerment and equality that feminism promotes. This resurgence of traditional values raises concerns about the potential reversal of social advancements, reminding society

that the struggle for women's rights and autonomy remains ongoing.

2.4.4 Popular influencers encouraging this trend

As it was previously stated in this research, the rise of social media platforms and the COVID-19 pandemic were promoters of the rise of "traditional values", as in fashion, trends come and go, and that is what is happening right now, with the rise of the ultra-right in the world. Contrary to the "Me Too" movement and the Fourth Wave of Feminism, where women empowered themselves to fight against patriarchy, young generations have started to align with these traditional values, and influencers have taken a chance to make money from it and perpetuate this stereotype. The following influencers are the faces of this problem.

2.4.4.1 Nara Smith

The first example of a Trad Wife influencer is Nara Smith, a South African and a twenty-two-year-old German model, mother to three children, married to Lucky Smith, an American model. With over 7.7 million followers on TikTok, she was one of the first influencers to begin with this type of content, of a woman who stays at home raising children and cooking for her husband. She became popular at the end of 2023 and 2024 when she started making videos of "cooking from scratch" for her husband and kids. At first, people liked her content because it was interesting to see how she made different recipes from scratch, for example, when she made mozzarella cheese. Quickly, the internet culture and seeing other creators make similar content, people started to realize that her content was aimed at another audience, and it suggested other ideas.

In Spanish-speaking social media, there is its counterpart, RoRo, a Spanish influencer who started doing the same content as Nara. However, this creator has gained popularity because her content is kind of a mocking of Nara Smith videos and her lifestyle.

Internet users found out about the "Trad Wife" culture and how, one way or another, it was tied to religion. Over time, rumors of her and her husband being part of the Mormon Church have flown around, but nothing has been confirmed yet.

Her image as a calm, beautiful, and devoted wife fit perfectly into the aesthetic that the Trad Wife narrative promotes. Unlike traditional influencers, Nara rarely shows signs of disagreement, frustration, or rebellion, which reinforces the image of a woman who is completely satisfied with her domestic role. This portrayal appeals to audiences who idealize a more conservative lifestyle and see modern feminism as something that has gone too far. In many ways, her videos romanticize domestic labor, turning everyday housework into something elegant, intentional, and aspirational.

Additionally, her visual identity, often dressed in neutral colors, minimal makeup, and a soft-spoken tone, adds to the idea of femininity that this trend promotes. Although she has not openly spoken about her political or religious beliefs, her lifestyle choices and the tone of her videos have contributed to the normalization and popularization of the Trad Wife movement among younger audiences on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. For many, she became the face of this movement, whether she intended to or not.

In short, Nara Smith's rise as a digital homemaker shows how social media can reshape traditional values into modern trends. While she may not openly claim to be part of the Trad Wife movement, the way her lifestyle is portrayed, along with her growing influence, has positioned her as a central figure within this narrative. Whether intentional or not, her content reflects a return to old-fashioned gender roles, wrapped in a visually appealing and curated aesthetic that resonates with a large audience. This makes her one of the most prominent examples of how the Trad Wife ideology continues to evolve in contemporary digital culture.

2.4.4.1 Hannah Neeleman (Ballerina Farm)

On another note, another popular Trad Wife influencer is Hannah Neeleman, or as her handle on social media, *Ballerina Farm*. With over 7.2 million followers on TikTok, she is married to Daniel Neeleman, the son of the founder of airline JetBlue. As her name suggests, Hannah is a thirty-four-year-old content creator and a former Juilliard ballet dancer. Her content goes around living on a ranch in Utah. Similar to Nara Smith, she became popular for cooking for eight children and her husband. Her rustic

aesthetic and farm life are what have captivated millions of people online. She has been criticized because in 2024, an article about her and her family was published. In this article, people got to know the story of how she and her husband met, and how he was very persistent about it, something that was really criticized by Feminists around the world. In that article, it is also mentioned that Hannah, due to the petition of her husband, was unable to graduate from Juilliard in New York City. This was because she was already pregnant by the time she was going to graduate, and the institution did not accept pregnant ballet dancers.

Same as with Nara Smith, the rumors of their religion are unclear; people think that because of the number of children they have and their conservative lifestyle, they are part of the Mormon Church, but nothing has been confirmed yet.

Her story sparked conversations not only because of her lifestyle, but also because of the way it contrasts with what is expected from modern women in professional and academic fields. Many internet users questioned how much of her choices were truly her own, and how much were influenced by her husband or by the traditional roles she now promotes. Her decision to leave behind a prestigious career in ballet to focus entirely on motherhood and farm life became a point of discussion. For some, it is seen as empowering that she embraces her domestic role with pride, but for others, it reinforces outdated gender roles that limit women's opportunities.

Despite the criticism, Hannah has managed to build a loyal following that admires her discipline, elegance, and dedication to her family. Her videos, where she is seen baking, taking care of animals, or organizing her household, present a romanticized version of rural life. This nostalgic image of femininity and motherhood makes her one of the most recognizable faces of the Trad Wife trend, especially among women who are looking for alternatives to modern city life and career-centered lifestyles. Her presence online continues to grow, turning her into a controversial yet influential example of how traditional values are being rebranded in the digital age.

In conclusion, Hannah Neeleman's image as a graceful mother, homemaker, and farmer has made

her a central figure within the Trad Wife narrative. Her background in ballet and her choice to prioritize family life over a professional career contribute to the idea that femininity is best expressed through sacrifice and domestic devotion. Although admired by many, her story also raises important questions about the expectations placed on women and the line between personal choice and social conditioning. Her influence shows how deeply the Trad Wife trend resonates in today's online spaces, especially when it is wrapped in beauty, nostalgia, and a carefully curated version of reality.

2.5. Symbols

Moving on to the following section of this literary analysis, there are the symbols. Matrix English Team (2025) gives the following definition: "Symbolism is when a symbol (object, action, subject...) is used to represent another meaning that is different from its literal definition" (para. 07)

In *Lessons in Chemistry*, there are quite a few symbols that help the reader understand the characters' personalities, motives, and different problems they face. An example of symbols in the novel is Elizabeth's lab coat, which, although most of her coworkers and superiors did not believe in her, and tried to bring her down many times in the novel, she stayed strong to her beliefs, it represented professionalism, being a woman in a male-dominated environment, as well as how she worked so hard to bury traditional gender roles and being a scientist, a TV star a mother at the same time.

Chapter III

Methodological Framework

The third chapter of this work is about the methodological framework, in my case, since I choose to do a literary analysis the methodological approach chosen is a qualitative investigation using the feministic approach, in which I am going to analyze the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by the author Bonnie Garmus from the feministic perspective, analyzing how the characters had to deal with sexism, the character of Elizabeth Zott as a starting point to analyze the struggle of women in male-dominated environments in the '50s and 60's, wrong ideas about women in science and how the feminist movement of that time affected modern feminism. This research not only aims to analyze the role of women in science and society but also the role of the feminist movement as a way of self-expression, in which women can prioritize their experiences and criticize gender roles and challenges different generations have faced.

The feminist approach comes in handy in this study because of the nature of the novel, in which we see how gender roles, stereotypes, and a patriarchal society do not allow brilliant women to thrive in the things they are great at. As well as the discrimination women suffer in the different chapters, and how, by the end of the novel, we see finally a victory for the female gender. The character of Elizabeth Zott is going to help us see through the eyes of women in the 50s and 60s and how women who wanted to go "against the flow" were heavily criticized, not only by men but by other women as well.

This analysis aligns with a term explained in the theoretical framework, which is feminist literary criticism, which examines how literature reflects male-dominated perspectives, as it happens in *Lessons in Chemistry*, where the main issue of the novel was that a brilliant woman was trying to do chemistry

and was criticized by the men who worked there. Here, I am going to explore the narrative techniques, character development, and themes that reinforced the patriarchal beliefs of the 50s and 60s seen in the novel. On the other hand, the analysis is also focused on how the struggles of women in that age helped not only to build a stronger definition of feminism but also work as a friendly reminder that most of the rights modern women have are due to the strength and bravery of women in the past.

Finally, this research is not only an academic piece but also engages a wider conversation about gender roles, stereotypes, and gender equality in a changing society moved by the internet, the trend of the “#Tradwives movement,” and a difficult scenario for women around the world. The following parts outline the specific research approach, design, information sources, analysis, instruments, and data analysis used to conduct this study.

3.1 Research Approach

As was mentioned in the previous page, this is a qualitative investigation, meaning that the approach I chose is going to help me in terms of how to collect information, what information to collect, and how to analyze and interpret data. Since this is a literary analysis, I am using a feminist approach using feminist literary criticism as the main device. The use of a qualitative approach is essential for analyzing the novel “Lessons in Chemistry”, as it is a novel set in a different time, and full of gender roles and feminist struggles.

Now, Feminist Research as a Methodology, what is it? Well, as defined by Aranda (2018), “Feminist research is grounded in a commitment to equality and social justice, and is cognisant of the gendered, historical and political processes involved in the production of knowledge.” (as cited in Wilson, 2023, p 87). As we can see from the information on top, this kind of research aims to look for equality between both male and female genders, not only in literature but also to deconstruct the ideas of a patriarchal society, and instead, have broader cultural narratives. Thus, feminist approaches and research create a powerful tool to analyze how gender roles, discrimination, and sexism are represented in fiction.

Now that I mentioned fiction, I can make an allusion to *Lessons in Chemistry* and why I choose using the feministic research approach instead of a formalistic or a historical one, the answer is pretty simple, and it is that from chapter one we can see the difficulties our main character, Elizabeth Zott has to face, we get to know that she was a chemist, not only that, but she was a single mother with a laboratory in the kitchen of her house, soon, we will understand the reason behind that. Also, the novel is full of feministic undertones, as well as using literary devices and ironies to represent the struggles the female characters of the novel have to face, not only Elizabeth as a scientist and main character but also her best friend, Harriet, a woman in an unhappy marriage, afraid with what society would think about her if she decided to divorce. Feminism does not only work as a theory but as a research method due to the complexity of the characters and setting of *Lessons in Chemistry*.

Finally, in the novel, we can see the different representations of the different gender roles and ideologies mixed with feminism when we see Elizabeth Zott as the main character, a determined woman against patriarchal norms, a role that falls a little bit behind when her T.V show "Supper at Six" airs and has to follow orders from a man, something she didn't like. On the other hand, the discrimination of women in scientific fields, such as what happens to Elizabeth two times in the novel, and the stereotypical thought that women belonged to the kitchen, a stereotype that Elizabeth Zott tried to erase since the first day "Supper at Six" aired, and a thought that, until the last day was like her motto, motivating the thousands of women watching her and remembering them that they were smart and more than just mothers.

3.2 Research Design

The research design serves to structure the methodology used in this investigation. Since the chosen novel's topic offers a lot of topics to explore, it is appropriate to use a descriptive and exploratory design. The descriptive approach helps to give different characteristics of the topic to study, in this case, to analyze gender roles, feminist struggles of that era, and society's reaction to these changes. This approach helps to show how the author, through Elizabeth Zott, manages to present ideas against

patriarchal norms and to focus on Elizabeth's struggles as a single mother and a chemist in a time full of stereotypes. On the other hand, the exploratory design serves to investigate subtle aspects that are not immediately visible, such as the ironies the author uses when referring to patriarchy. Furthermore, it helps to analyze the deeper meaning of the novel's various themes and to relate them to feminist concepts from that time and modern feminism, allowing for an easier understanding of feminist topics. Also, this approach helps to investigate the social context of that era.

3.3 Information Sources

For this analysis, it is important to know the information sources because this will help me, as a writer, get the information that I need and give you, the reader, the credibility that this work needs. Since this is a literary analysis and this is qualitative research, there is not much that I can do with other people since the novel was written in a period and a country I don't belong to. What I can do is divide the sources into two: primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources are those that involve the topic itself; in this case, the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* is a primary source, because it is where most of my information comes from. It is the original material to start my analysis on, and it is like "raw" data because nobody has changed it. Here, I am going to analyze the themes, style, and character development. On the other hand, primary sources can also be literary studies, letters, documents found on museum pages, and more.

Then, the secondary sources came; for this study, the secondary sources are the papers, or the analysis people do with or to the primary sources. For example, secondary sources can be literary analysis, journal articles, feminist manifestations, dictionaries, and opinion papers. Also, in this case, for my analysis, I am going to investigate how people in that decade were, and how society worked using historical references and the tools explained above.

3.4 Analysis Categories

Now, moving on to the categories analysis, in this case, are the specific categories and material chosen to analyze, which are previously mentioned in the theoretical framework. This is qualitative

research, meaning that there is going to be an analysis of data and text. For example, *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus is the text of analysis, and that analysis contains the major themes of the novel, as well as the characters and social context. Likewise, as it was mentioned earlier, topics like feminism in literature, historical and social context, the struggle of women in science, and the contemporary narrative of the #Tradwives movement. Those categories are essential to develop a proper literary analysis.

3.4.1 Male-Dominated Environment

A male-dominated environment, as the name suggests, is the presence or dominance of men in a workplace or an environment where the presence of women is not the most common, for example, science and engineering fields.

3.4.2 Feminist Movement

As it was previously defined at the beginning of this investigation, Raina (2017) defines it as "Feminism is a wide range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes."

3.4.3 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are a generalized perception or assumption that society has given to men and women about the roles, traits, and behaviors they are expected to follow to fit in society.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this research are going to be comparative tables. Here, the researcher will do one table per objective. This is in order to have a well-structured literary analysis of the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus. Each table will include textual evidence from the novel and a commentary from the researcher that reflects the application of the feminist literary approach.

3.5.1 Struggle that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment

The first table aims to evaluate the struggles that women in the 1950s and 1960s endured when working in male-dominated environments, particularly in scientific fields. Using quotes from the novel, the researcher will attempt to highlight specific moments in which Elizabeth Zott and other characters are mistreated solely because of their gender. This analysis will help the researcher identify feminist elements, such as inequality, resistance, and the demand for gender equity in professional settings.

Table 1. Struggles that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment

The Struggles that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment	Quote from the book	Researchers Commentary

Researcher's creation

3.5.2 Why did society at the time not accept women to become professionals?

The purpose of the following table is to explore the societal norms and cultural expectations in the 1950s and early 1960s that discouraged women from pursuing professional careers. *Lessons in Chemistry* portrays a historical period in which women's roles were primarily confined to being homemakers, and any woman who did not fit in that stereotype was heavily criticized.

Table 2. Societal norms and cultural expectations in the 1950s and early 1960s

Element	Quote from the book	Researchers Commentary

Researcher's creation

3.5.3 Analysis on the factors of the Feminist Movement in the 1950s and 1960s that impacted modern Feminism

This third table focuses on identifying and analyzing the most significant factors of the feminist

movement during the 1950s and 1960s as reflected in *Lessons in Chemistry*. The novel illustrates how early feminist ideas, such as the fight for equal rights, access to education, and professional recognition, emerged as a response to gender oppression in postwar society. Through this analysis, the researcher will establish a connection between the fictional representation and real-world feminist advancements, illustrating the novel's value as a feminist literary work.

Table 3. Factors of the Feminist Movement in the 1950s and 1960s

Factors of Feminism in the 1950s and 1960s	Example from the book	Researchers Commentary
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Researcher's creation

3.5.4 Themes

For the following table, the focus is to analyze the themes present in *Lessons in Chemistry*. These literary elements are essential in understanding the deeper meanings and messages conveyed by the author. The researcher will identify recurring ideas (themes) in *Lessons in Chemistry*, highlighting recurring ideas that reflect the novel's deeper messages and social critique.

Table 4. Themes

Themes	Researchers Commentary
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Researcher's creation

3.5.5 Motifs

For the following table, the focus is to analyze the motifs present in *Lessons in Chemistry*. This section explores the motifs in *Lessons in Chemistry*, focusing on recurring elements and patterns that reinforce the novel's key themes and narrative tone.

Table 5. Motifs

Motif	Researchers Commentary
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Researcher's creation

3.5.6 Symbols

The last table focuses on the analysis of symbols present in *Lessons in Chemistry*. This section examines the symbols used in *Lessons in Chemistry*, concentrating on objects and actions that convey deeper meanings and reinforce the novel's central ideas.

Table 6. Symbols

Symbols	Researchers Commentary
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Researcher's creation

3.6 Collection Data Process and Data Analysis

For this step, it is important to mention that the book chosen for the literary analysis is *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus, using the Feminist literary approach. In order to have a well-written literary analysis, the researcher is going to do a second reading. This rereading aims to identify feminist subtones, symbolic elements, and implicit commentary on gender roles that may not have been evident during the first reading. This second reading is also going to help the researcher to look for the little details that were probably not seen in the first reading, and to have a better understanding of the Feminist subtones the writer suggests with her words.

The researcher will download a digital copy of the book (in addition to the physical one) for easier access to the citations she will use for the analysis in the charts. This digital copy is going to help the researcher with the process of highlighting and referencing specific passages. This digital format will allow for easier citation and extraction of quotes, which will later be organized into analytical charts to help with the data collection. Once collected, the data will be organized into the comparative tables that are seen in section 3.5.

The analysis will focus on topics such as patriarchy, gender inequality, marginalization, and empowerment. The study will also draw connections between events in the story and real feminist movements from the 1950s and 1960s, helping to place the novel in a broader historical and social context.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

This fourth chapter focuses on the analysis of the data collected from the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus. Guided by feminist literary theory, this study aims to examine how gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics are portrayed through the experiences of the protagonist and other female characters. By examining key themes, motifs, and symbols in the text, this chapter explores the ways in which the narrative challenges traditional gender norms and highlights the systemic barriers faced by women in a male-dominated society. The analysis is structured around central themes such as inequality in the workplace, scientific erasure, and societal expectations of women. Each section includes textual evidence from the novel, followed by a critical interpretation based on feminist concepts. The following pages offer a detailed examination of how *Lessons in Chemistry* critiques patriarchal structures through its characters, plot, and symbolic elements.

4.1 Approaches to the investigation

This research is going to use the Feminist Approach for the literary analysis. Since this is a qualitative investigation, the goal is to analyze the objectives previously stated in Chapter I, as well as to interpret the novel through a critical lens that highlights gender inequality, challenges patriarchal norms, and amplifies women's voices and experiences. As well as to analyze the role of women in science and how society has mistreated women from very early stages, starting with the fact of not allowing women to develop their intelligence and tying them to do domestic work and nothing else. Feminist literary theory

provides the foundation for this analysis, allowing the researcher to focus on how female characters are represented, how power dynamics are constructed, and how gender roles are reinforced or subverted within the narrative. Another important aspect to analyze is how, thanks to the second wave of Feminism in the 1950s and 1960s and the advancements in technology, modern women have empowered themselves to fight for their rights and choose what kind of lifestyle they want.

4.2 Theory vs Literary Work

This section is going to continue with the development of the information written in Chapter III. This section is focused on the development and analysis based on the objectives stated in Chapter I. Here, the researcher is going to use six different tables that are going to be divided into two or three columns, depending on the subject to analyze, using the Feminist point of view, of course. These tables are intended to organize and present the data in a clear and systematic way, facilitating the connection between theoretical concepts and literary evidence.

This structure helps show how *Lessons in Chemistry* presents the challenges and resistance women face in a male-dominated society. Also, organizing the information this way makes it easier to compare the feminist theory with the content of the novel. In this way, the analysis supports the main objective of the research: to study the novel from a feminist perspective using concrete examples from the text.

4.2.1 Table 1 Struggles that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment

This first chart aims to understand the struggles that women in the 1950s and 1960s had to endure when, not only choosing to work, but to do it in an environment where it was not common to see women working, using the character of Elizabeth Zott in the book to have a clearer understanding.

Struggles that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment	Quote from the book	Researchers Commentary
Society's idea that women	"Except her grudges were mainly	Since the first chapters of the

<p>were not capable of working in a field dominated by men.</p>	<p>reserved for a patriarchal society founded on the idea that women were less. Less capable. Less intelligent. Less inventive.” (Garmus, 2022, p.20)</p>	<p>novel, the reader gets to understand the position of Elizabeth Zott in terms of her place as a woman working in a male-dominated field, and how men did not want women in those fields.</p>
<p>Women are being underestimated by men for the simple reason that they were women.</p>	<p>“A place that didn’t always automatically mistake her for a secretary, a place where, when she presented her findings in a meeting, she didn’t have to brace herself for the men who would invariably talk over her, or worse, take credit for her work. Elizabeth shook her head. When it came to equality, 1952 was a real disappointment.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 20-21)</p>	<p>The passage shows a reality that probably not only Elizabeth was dealing with. She dreamed of the idea of someday having her sacrifices rewarded instead of being always called a secretary.</p>
<p>Men are crushing women’s self-esteem to feel more powerful.</p>	<p>“His plan was simple: first, attack Zott’s self-esteem. Women were so easily crushed. “Like I said,” Donatti emphasized as he stood, sucking in his gut as he shooed her toward the door. “You’re just not smart enough.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 77)</p>	<p>Men used “psychological weapons” against women to make them feel bad about themselves. This is with the purpose of lifting their egos and feeling more powerful in front of women.</p>
<p>The idea that women could only climb the career path with the help of a man.</p>	<p>“Donatti rolled his eyes as a puff of stale air escaped his lips. Why were</p>	<p>Although it was not common for women in that period to work, especially in male-dominated</p>

	<p>brilliant people so dumb? If Evans had any brains at all, he'd accuse him of attempting to horn in on his good-looking girlfriend. Actually, Cal, Donatti said, stubbing out a cigarette, "I was trying to give her career a little boost. Giving her a chance to work with me directly on a very important project. Help her grow in other areas." There, Donatti thought. Grow in other areas—how obvious could he be?" (Garmus, 2022, p. 81)</p>	<p>environments, powerful men still thought that the only way for them to scale the career path was with the help of another man. Calvin (Elizabeth's love interest) never saw Elizabeth that way, and despite the fact that he tried several times to help her to have the recognition she deserved, she never accepted.</p>
<p>Harassment from a male supervisor.</p>	<p>"His first blow was an open-handed slap that spun her head to the left like a well-hit tetherball. She gasped in shock, then managed to right herself, her mouth bleeding, her eyes wide with disbelief. He grimaced as if unsatisfied with his results, then hit her again, this time knocking her off the stool. Meyers was a big man—nearly 250 pounds—his strength a product of density, not fitness. He bent down to where she lay on the floor and, grabbing her by the hips, hoisted</p>	<p>It is mentioned in the novel that this supervisor was a "lecher" and not many secretaries lasted in their jobs. It is difficult to understand how women had to face these different mistreatments from their male coworkers just because they were in a position of power, where the one who could lose everything if they spoke up was the woman and not the perpetrator.</p>

	<p>her up like a crane lifting a sloppy load of lumber, plunking her back down on the stool like a rag doll. Then he flipped her over, and kicking the stool away, slammed her face and chest against the stainless-steel counter. “Hold still, cunt,” he demanded as she struggled, his fat fingers clawing beneath her skirt.</p> <p>Elizabeth gasped, the taste of metal filling her mouth as he mauled her, one hand pulling her skirt up past her waist, the other twisting the skin of her inner thighs. With her face flat against the table, she could barely breathe, let alone scream. She kicked back furiously like an animal caught in a trap, but her refusal to concede only infuriated him more.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 23-24)</p>	
<p>Degradation and disrespectful comments from male coworkers.</p>	<p>“She tried to talk with them, but each gave her the cold shoulder in their own way, and later, as she was walking by the lounge, she overheard the same few grousing</p>	<p>Since in the 1950s and 1960s people used to get married young, men were always on a rush to find a wife, and the fact that they were not a lot of women working in male-</p>

	<p>about her</p> <p>—about how she took herself so seriously, how she thought she was better than any of them, how she'd refused dates from all of them, even the single men. And how the only way she could have possibly gotten. her master's</p> <p>from UCLA in organic chemistry was the hard way—the word “hard”</p> <p>being accompanied by rude gestures and tight laughter. Who did she think she was anyway?</p> <p>“Someone ought to put her in her place,” said one.</p> <p>“She's not even that smart,” insisted another.</p> <p>“She's a cunt,” declared a familiar voice. Her boss, Donatti.”</p> <p>(Garmus, 2022, p. 21)</p>	<p>dominated environments, they had to face severe comments from those men who did not accept “no” as an answer.</p>
<p>Rejection from a higher education program, due to patriarchy and societal norms.</p>	<p>“The attack, or “unfortunate event,” as the admissions committee called it just before they formally rescinded her admittance to the doctoral program, had been her doing. Dr. Meyers had caught her cheating. She'd tried to</p>	<p>Women were forced to “accept failure” or not being able to continue achieving their goals if they reported any kind of harassment, because the society of that time made women less valuable, and a man's word was more valuable than theirs.</p>

	<p>change a test protocol to skew the experiment's results—he had the proof right here—and when he'd confronted her, she'd thrown herself at him, offering sex. When that didn't work, a physical fight ensued and before he knew it, he had a pencil in his gut. He was lucky to be alive. Almost no one bought this story. Dr. Meyers had a reputation. But he was also important, and UCLA had no intention of losing someone of his stature. Elizabeth was out. Her master's was complete. Her bruises would heal. Someone would write her a recommendation. Go.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 26)</p>	
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Researcher's Creation

4.2.2 Table 2. Societal norms and cultural expectations in the 1950s and early 1960s

Table 2 explores the societal norms and cultural expectations that shaped women's roles during the 1950s and early 1960s, providing essential historical context for understanding the challenges faced by the protagonist in *Lessons in Chemistry*.

Element	Quote from the book	Researcher's Commentary
Career vs Motherhood Conflict	“A society that believed men	This quote illustrates how

	<p>went to work and did important things—discovered planets, developed products, created laws—and women stayed at home and raised children. She didn’t want children—she knew this about herself—but she also knew that plenty of other women did want children and a career.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 20)</p>	<p>divided the society was in terms of labor and who in the house was the provider. They thought men were the only ones capable of having well-paying jobs and left the labor of homemakers to their wives, without considering what their true desires were.</p>
Sexist Media Norms.	<p>“The lyrics were racist, the actors were white, and it was blatantly obvious that the female lead was going to be blamed for everyone else’s misdeeds. The whole thing reminded her of work. She decided to cut her losses and leave at intermission.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 27)</p>	<p>In this quote, the author criticizes the normalized racism and gender oppression. It was so easy for society at that time to just blame women for the bad things that happened, as women were perceived as dumb and less capable than men to do anything more than raise children and cook for their husbands.</p>
Fewer Opportunities for Women to Study.	<p>“The problem, Calvin,” she asserted, “is that half the population is being wasted. It’s not just that I can’t get the supplies I need to complete my work, it’s that women can’t get the education they need to do what they’re</p>	<p>This quote represents how difficult was for women to aim for a career; it was difficult for them because colleges did not offer the same opportunities to women as they did to men, as the norm was for women to marry and stay at home. When those opportunities came, it was</p>

	<p>meant to do. And even if they do attend college, it will never be a place like Cambridge. Which means they won't be offered the same opportunities nor afforded the same respect. They'll start at the bottom and stay there. Don't even get me started on pay. And all because they didn't attend a school that wouldn't admit them in the first place.”</p> <p>“You're saying,” he said slowly, “that more women actually want to be in science.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 31)</p>	<p>something difficult to maintain due to the lack of resources and the competition with other men to fill those jobs.</p>
<p>Marriage Being the Ultimate Goal of a Woman</p>	<p>“Most of the women she'd met in college claimed they were only there to get their MRS. It was disconcerting, as if they'd all drunk something that had rendered them temporarily insane. “But instead,” she continued, “women are at home, making babies and cleaning rugs. It's legalized</p>	<p>This quote criticized how domestic labor and patriarchal norms reached out to some intelligent women, they started to follow societal norms just to fit in a society that did not care about women, their well-being and their ability to be more than homemakers. A society that devalued women's potential and undermined them.</p>

	<p>slavery. Even the women who wish to be homemakers find their work completely misunderstood. Men seem to think the average mother of five's biggest decision of the day is what color to paint her nails." (Garmus, 2022, p. 31-32)</p>	
<p>Societal Rejection of People with Different Sexualities.</p>	<p>"John—my brother—was a homosexual," Elizabeth said. "Oh," he said, as if now he understood. "I'm sorry." She propped herself up on one elbow and peered at him in the darkness. "What is that supposed to mean?" she shot back. "Well, but—how did you know? Surely he didn't tell you he was." "I'm a scientist, Calvin, remember? I knew. Anyway, there's nothing wrong with homosexuality; it's completely normal— a basic fact of human biology. I have no idea why people don't know this. Does no one read</p>	<p>Here it is identified how the societal norms not only worked against women but also against people from the gay community. In this quote it is seen how no matter the fact that Elizabeth's brother was a man, he still got criticized by a society that was not ready, not only to accept having a women choosing between being a stay-at-home mother vs choosing to study and work but neither to see two men holding hands. This also shows how, although Elizabeth's character is very rigid and science based, she understood and accepted her brother the way he was.</p>

	<p>Margaret Mead anymore? The point is, I knew John was a homosexual, and he knew I knew. We talked about it. He didn't choose it; it was simply part of who he was. The best part was," she said wistfully, "he knew about me, too." "Knew you were—" "A scientist!" Elizabeth snapped. "Look, I realize this may be hard for you to fathom given your own terrible circumstances, but while we may be born into families, it doesn't necessarily mean we belong to them." "But we do—" "No. You need to understand this, Calvin. People like my father preach love but are filled with hate. Anyone who threatens their narrow beliefs cannot be tolerated. The day my mother caught my brother holding hands with another boy, that was it. After a year of hearing that he was an aberration and didn't deserve to</p>	
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	live, he went out to the shed with a rope.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 43-44)	
Marriage as a Woman’s Measure of Worth	<p>“Her mother had always insisted that the measure of a woman was how well she married. “I could have married Billy Graham,” she’d often claimed.</p> <p>“Don’t think he wasn’t interested. By the way, Elizabeth, when you do get engaged, insist on the biggest rock possible. That way, if the marriage doesn’t work out, you can hock it.” As it turned out, her mother was speaking from experience. When her parents filed for divorce, it was revealed she’d been married three times before.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 56-57)</p>	<p>This quote illustrates why it was normalized for people to marry young; they were following in their parents' footsteps without considering what they truly wanted. Elizabeth’s mother's words make her believe that the only way for society to accept her as a respectable woman is by marrying an economically well-off or very wealthy man.</p> <p>Something that did not align with Elizabeth’s ideals.</p>
Loss of Female Identity Through Marriage	<p>“I don’t want to be another Mileva Einstein or Esther Lederberg, Calvin; I refuse.</p> <p>And even if we took all the proper legal steps to ensure my name won’t change, it will still change. Everyone will call me Mrs. Calvin Evans; I will become</p>	<p>Elizabeth refusal to marry Calvin was not just a silly tantrum, she was very smart. She knew that marrying an important chemist like Calvin Evans meant that her contributions to science were going to be overshadowed by her husband's name, like happened to the female</p>

	<p>Mrs. Calvin Evans. Every Christmas card, every bank statement, every notice from the Bureau of Internal Revenue will all come to Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Evans. Elizabeth Zott, as we know her, will cease to exist.”</p> <p>“And being Mrs. Calvin Evans is absolutely the worst thing that could ever happen to you,” he said, his face collapsed in misery.</p> <p>“I want to be Elizabeth Zott,” she said. “It’s important to me.”</p> <p>(Garmus, 2022, p. 58)</p>	<p>scientists she mentions. Although she loved Calvin, she put her and her career first, and her, as a Feminist icon encouraged women to do the same.</p>
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Researcher’s Creation

4.2.3 Table 3. Factors of the Feminist Movement in the 1950s and 1960s

Table 3 examines the key factors that contributed to the rise of the feminist movement in the 1950s and 1960s, linking them to the experiences and struggles portrayed in *Lessons in Chemistry*.

Factor	Example from the book	Researcher’s Commentary
Workplace discrimination due to pregnancy.	<p>“You’re firing me on the basis of being pregnant and unwed. What about the man?”</p> <p>“What man? You mean Evans?” Donatti asked.</p> <p>“Any man. When a woman gets pregnant outside of marriage, does the</p>	<p>This first quote illustrates the difficulties women had to face in their workplaces. Facing discrimination and the loss of a job for natural reasons, such as pregnancy, shows how Feminists in the 1950s and 1960s knew there must be a change in the system for</p>

	<p>man who made her pregnant get fired, too?"</p> <p>"What? What are you talking about?"</p> <p>"Would you have fired Calvin, for instance?"</p> <p>"Of course not!"</p> <p>"If not, then, technically, you have no grounds to fire me."</p> <p>Donatti looked confused. What?</p> <p>"Of course, I do," he stumbled.</p> <p>"Of course, I do! You're the woman! You're the one who got knocked up!" (Garmus, 2022, p. 119)</p>	<p>younger generations to be capable of being independent women and securing their jobs.</p>
<p>Unfair treatment of women who were victims of sexual violence</p>	<p>"I'm a chemist. Not a woman chemist. A chemist. A damn good one!"</p> <p>"Well, I'm a personnel expert! An almost-psychologist," Frask shouted.</p> <p>"Almost-psychologist?"</p> <p>"Shut up."</p> <p>"No really," Zott said.</p> <p>"Almost?"</p> <p>"I didn't have a chance to finish, okay? What about you? Why aren't you a PhD, Zott?" Frask shot back.</p> <p>Elizabeth hardened, and without meaning to, revealed a fact about</p>	<p>This quote examines the similar experiences both characters had and how difficult was for women to speak up about abuse, and when they did it, people did not believe them. The same thing happens in modern society, since many victims of abuse decide not to speak up because most of the time they are criticized rather than helped.</p>

	<p>herself that she'd never told anyone other than a police officer. "Because I was sexually violated by my thesis advisor, then kicked out of the doctoral program," she shouted. "You?" Frask looked back, shocked. "Same," she said limply. (Garmus, 2022, p. 181)</p>	
<p>Double standards in reproductive consequences.</p>	<p>"You're saying that if an unmarried man makes an unmarried woman pregnant, there is no consequence for him. His life goes on. Business as usual." "This is not our fault," Frask interrupted. "You were trying to trap Evans into marriage. It's obvious." (Garmus, 2022, p. 119)</p>	<p>That quotation implies that the reproductive responsibility fell solely on the woman, no matter if she was married or not. The patriarchal society of that time left unmarried men without any responsibility, and the one who was going to be criticized was the woman.</p>
<p>Limited reproductive rights in the 1950s.</p>	<p>"Why had she waited so long to come in? She was well into her last trimester. "Work," she told him. But that was a lie. The real reason was because she'd quietly hoped the pregnancy would take care of itself. End as these things sometimes do. In the</p>	<p>This quote shows the lack of reproductive rights for women in the 1950s and how women who in a way or another got pregnant out of wedlock were heavily judged by another people. For that reason, women like Elizabeth had to carry their pregnancy alone to avoid judgmental looks and comments</p>

	<p>1950s, abortion was out of the question.</p> <p>Coincidentally, so was having a baby out of wedlock. (Garmus, 2022, p. 135)</p>	<p>from others. In a world where abortion was also a social condemnation of women.</p>
<p>Social Pressure on Women to Embrace Motherhood.</p>	<p>“Not every woman wants to be a mother,” he agreed, surprising her.</p> <p>“More to the point, not every woman should be.” He grimaced as if thinking of someone in particular. “Still, I’m surprised by how many women sign up for motherhood considering how difficult pregnancy can be—morning sickness, stretch marks, death. Again, you’re fine,” he added quickly, taking in her horrified face. “It’s just that we tend to treat pregnancy as the most common condition in the world—as ordinary as stubbing a toe—when the truth is, it’s like getting hit by a truck. Although obviously a truck causes less damage.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 136)</p>	<p>This quote represents the social pressure women from the 1950s had to embrace in terms of maternity and how normalized it was back then. The only difference is that, back then women who did not wish to be mothers faced more social consequences and birthing a child was far riskier than now. Sadly, in the past women did not have the same access to resources as now, making that experience more traumatic.</p>
<p>Professional Discrimination</p>	<p>“I think you might be the only</p>	<p>This quote reflects the</p>

<p>Based on Gender and Maternity Assumptions.</p>	<p>woman at Hastings—out of three thousand employees, mind you—who isn’t a secretary. I can’t imagine how that could have happened. And yet you still tried to pass yourself off as a man. Is there any level to which you won’t stoop? By the way, do you know why the institute says we ladies aren’t a good investment? It’s because we’re always running off and having babies. Like you did.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 180)</p>	<p>difficulties for women who had children and decided to work. They were usually mistreated, their departments didn’t usually had a lot of resources, and they never had the same salaries as their male counterparts. Their bosses saw them just as baby-making machines who could not maintain a job. In the present, these discriminations still happen in private institutions, companies don’t usually hire pregnant women because they know they are going to be an economic burden for the company</p>
<p>Workplace Weight Discrimination.</p>	<p>“Now I’m the one who’s been fired,” Frask said matter-of-factly. “I’m out this Friday.” “What? Why?” “Remember my seven-point improvement plan? Lose twenty pounds? I gained seven.” “You can’t be fired for gaining weight,” Elizabeth said. “That’s illegal.” Frask leaned over and squeezed Elizabeth’s arm. “Gosh, you know what? I never tire of your</p>	<p>This final quote illustrates another discrimination factor women faced, weight discrimination. In the 1950s there were a certain beauty standards, and same as with the other factors of discrimination, society expected to follow this societal norm as well. In present society, there still are companies who following this norm and young people have given the name of “body shaming” or, in other words, the action of criticizing somebody for their weight.</p>

	naïveté.” “I’m serious,” Elizabeth said. “You must fight it, Miss Frask. You can’t let them do this.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 183)	
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4.2.4 Table 4 Themes

Table 4 presents the main themes found in *Lessons in Chemistry*, highlighting the central ideas that reflect the novel’s feminist perspective and social commentary.

Theme	Researcher’s Commentary
Gender Discrimination	Gender discrimination is a powerful and recurrent theme in <i>Lessons in Chemistry</i> , from Elizabeth being discriminated against several times in Hastings for her condition as a woman in science. How her colleges didn’t believe in her findings, despite her extraordinary intelligence, to having a romantic relationship out of wedlock with one of the top scientists there, Calvin Evans, one of the only few people in Hastings that believed in her intelligence to his unexpected passing and finding out she was pregnant with his child to then being fired for that same reason is something that shows how gender discrimination was the usual for women in America in the 1950s. This theme was considered by the researcher because the novel makes it clear that this was something that women used to face every day, especially a woman like Elizabeth Zott, who was into science.
Grief and Emotional Recovery	The following theme of the novel is grief and

emotional recovery; throughout the story, the reader can see how fragile Elizabeth Zott really is. From living away from her family to her brother's passing away when she was ten years old, to having a job in which none of her colleagues trusted in her intelligence, it is clear that she had a couple of emotional wounds to fix. Meeting Calvin meant everything for her, he understood her and accepted her with her "crazy ideas" and was willing to have a non-traditional family with her, and finally, she was going to have a real family. But Calvin ends up passing away, she is fired from her job as a scientist in Hastings, and her biggest fear came through, she was going to be a mother, alone and with no job. And she, instead of letting that pain swallow her away, decided to build herself a laboratory for her experiments in her kitchen, because although Hastings turned her back on her, she was not going to give up on her abiogenesis research. Even though at first glance Elizabeth's character may be perceived as a very isolated woman, towards the end of the novel, thanks to her TV show "Supper at Six", her dog Six Thirty, and the help of powerful women like Harriet Sloan and Avery Parker, she is found in a better place emotionally and surrounded by people who love her. This theme is important for the literary analysis because it shows how, although the main character did not fit in the societal expectations of that time, she still made her way up, not only for herself, but because she had Mad, her little girl watching how strong her mother was.

<p>Motherhood and Identity Formation</p>	<p>Elizabeth's idea of motherhood was clear from the beginning of the novel; she did not want to be a mother. When her relationship with Calvin started, she made that really clear, but after a couple of unfortunate events, she realized she is pregnant with his child. The first couple of months sent Elizabeth into a spiral; she had lost her job and had nobody to help her economically. When she gave birth to Madeline, she isolated her and her dog from the outside world until Harriet Sloan came to her rescue in the first months postpartum. Elizabeth had a clear idea of how she wanted to raise her daughter, alone and without the help of any man. Since Mad was a baby, she taught her to write, and instead of reading her short stories to sleep, she used to read her complex books. This was because Elizabeth wanted her child to exploit her intelligence. Her parenting style fosters independence, curiosity, and resilience in Mad, reflecting a model of motherhood rooted in partnership rather than control. The novel shows how motherhood can coexist with intellectual ambition and self-actualization. This theme is important for the novel because it shows how Elizabeth decided to go against what society in the 1950s wanted from her and her parenting style.</p>
<p>Science as Power and Liberation</p>	<p>This theme fits perfectly with Elizabeth Zott's character, as science is her entire life. She says that since she was a child, she has used science as a way of liberation. This is portrayed after Calvin's death when she returns to work before</p>

	<p>she had to; this was because that was her way of coping with anxiety. When she gets pregnant with her daughter and gets fired from Hastings, the first thing she does is build herself a lab in her kitchen. Funny enough, her old colleagues at Hastings go to her house looking for help with their investigations. In that same kitchen, she prepares her daughter's delicious lunches with a secret, using chemistry. Which then, when her cooking show "Supper at Six" aired, she used the exact same formulas she used in the kitchen of her house and explained about chemistry and the different reactions different ingredients had. In that way, Elizabeth encouraged the women watching her show to use their intelligence instead of being labeled as housewives. Elizabeth refuses to wear the typical wardrobe her boss wanted her to wear because she states that she is talking about chemistry and not trying to appeal to men. This theme is considered in the analysis because it shows how Feminism and women who are willing to make a change help change the future of hundreds of women.</p>
Patriarchal Control and Systemic Oppression	<p>This theme plays a huge role throughout the novel, especially when looking at how Elizabeth is constantly fighting against not just individual people, but entire systems that are built to keep women in their place. From the very beginning, Elizabeth is not just facing rude colleagues or unfair bosses like Dr. Donatti or Phil Lebensmal. Elizabeth's life is shaped by these systems at every step. She gets rejected from graduate programs not because she isn't qualified, but</p>

	<p>because she's a woman. She's constantly underestimated in her workplace, where men like Donatti and others act like she doesn't belong, no matter how brilliant she is. Even when she falls in love with Calvin, the one person who sees her as an equal, their relationship is judged because they aren't married, and when she becomes pregnant, she's fired. Sadly, these things happen because of her condition as a woman and a woman who does not want to follow societal expectations, punishing her for that same reason. But Elizabeth never accepts that. She doesn't yell or march or give speeches, but every decision she makes is an act of resistance. She wears what she wants. She teaches chemistry on TV even when she's told not to do it. She raises her daughter to think for herself, to ask questions, and to never settle. This theme matters because it reminds us that patriarchy isn't just about men being in charge; it's about how everything is designed to keep women from reaching their full potential. And yet, through Elizabeth, we see that change is possible, not easy, not fast, but real. Her story shows that when women refuse to be silenced, even the strongest systems can start to break.</p>
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4.2.5 Table 5 Motifs

Table 05 outlines the recurring motifs in *Lessons in Chemistry*, emphasizing patterns and elements that reinforce the novel's key themes and feminist undertones.

Motif	Researcher's Commentary
Chemistry	<p>This is a recurring motif in the story because it is not only the literal field in which Elizabeth specializes but also symbolizes something much larger. Chemistry is what Elizabeth's world turns around, and it is the tool she uses not only to explain natural phenomena but also to navigate her emotions, identity, and relationships. This motif appears several times in the novel, as chemistry is her safe space, when Calvin dies, while she is pregnant and without a job, and in her TV show, "Supper at Six". This motif is significant for literary analysis because it demonstrates how Elizabeth transforms what others perceive as a male-dominated discipline into her form of liberation and expression. Chemistry appears again and again throughout the novel, not just as science, but as language, comfort, defiance, and freedom.</p>
Lab Coat	<p>Throughout <i>Lessons in Chemistry</i>, the lab coat appears again and again, not just as part of Elizabeth's wardrobe, but as a constant reminder of her identity, her struggle, and her resistance. The lab coat is one of the few things that remains unchanged while everything else in her life falls apart, Calvin dies, she loses her job, becomes a mother, and redefines her place in the world. The repetition of the lab coat shows that no matter what happens to her, Elizabeth does not let go of who she is: a scientist. While society keeps trying to push her into other roles, housewife, single mother, TV host, she keeps going back to the lab</p>

	<p>coat to remember who she is. This motif matters because it connects deeply with other themes in the novel, like patriarchal control, identity, and liberation through science. It helps the reader understand how Elizabeth survives in a world designed to erase women's ambitions.</p>
Dogs (Six-Thirty)	<p>The following motif of the novel are dogs, especially Elizabeth's dog, Six-Thirty. Six-Thirty is not just a background character; he is Elizabeth's quiet companion during some of the hardest moments in her life. From Calvin's death to the isolation of early motherhood, he is always there, watching, understanding, and providing comfort without ever needing words. Dogs and their instinctive loyalty serve as a quiet but powerful reminder that connection doesn't always come through speech or social norms; sometimes it comes through presence, through feeling. Six-Thirty is part of Elizabeth's chosen family, and through him, the novel shows that emotional intelligence is not only human. This motif matters because it gives the story heart. Through Six-Thirty, the novel reminds the reader that love, support, and understanding sometimes come from the most unexpected places, and that those who truly see us for who we are often don't need to say anything at all.</p>
Secretaries and Typewriters	<p>The image of secretaries and typewriters is a constant reminder of women's limited roles in the workforce and how society tried to define them. In the 1950s, typewriters were machines that symbolized where women belonged: behind a desk, taking notes, recording men's ideas, but</p>

	<p>never contributing their own. Most women at Hastings worked as secretaries, and this was not because they lacked intelligence or ambition, but because they were never given the chance to be more. What's especially important about this motif is how it captures the invisible labor women were expected to perform, and Elizabeth Zott was not willing to be a part of it. This motif matters because it reflects a generation of women trapped in roles designed to shrink them, and it celebrates the few who pushed back.</p>
Television as Transformation	<p>Television becomes a powerful motif in <i>Lessons in Chemistry</i>, although Elizabeth does not want to participate in it at first, she ends up accepting it because she needs to provide for her daughter. At first glance, Elizabeth's show "Supper at Six" seems like it would follow the 1950s housewife formula: a woman cooking dinner, smiling, and pleasing an audience. But Elizabeth redefines the entire purpose of the show. She takes something traditionally used to reinforce gender norms and uses it instead to challenge them. The kitchen becomes a lab, and the camera becomes a tool. Instead of following the script, Elizabeth uses each episode to teach women chemistry, to encourage them to think for themselves, and to dismantle the myth that their only role is to serve others. This motif is important because for the viewers of "Supper at Six," television becomes a lifeline, a reminder that they are smart, capable, and worthy of more than what society tells them. For Elizabeth, it's the platform where she becomes her full self: a mother, a chemist, a</p>

	teacher, and a woman unwilling to be shaped by anyone else's expectations.
Books and Knowledge	<p>Books appear again and again in the novel, and they aren't just background objects; they're a clear motif that represents freedom, rebellion, and identity. From the very beginning, Elizabeth uses books to shape her mind. While other mothers read fairytales and lullabies as bedtime stories, Elizabeth reads complex books about science and mechanics to her daughter. Through these books, Elizabeth shows her daughter that there is more to life than the narrow roles society wants for girls. Books are also a way of building community. Elizabeth shares them with Calvin, with Harriet, and even Six-Thirty, inspiring women who watch her show to keep learning. This motif reminds the reader that knowledge is power, and for women like Elizabeth, books were not just for learning; they were for survival and transformation.</p>
Numbers and Data Sources	<p>Numbers and data play a quiet but powerful role throughout <i>Lessons in Chemistry</i>. For Elizabeth Zott, numbers are not just tools; they're a language she trusts, one that makes sense when nothing else does. This is clear in her work at Hastings, where she constantly relies on experimentation, data collection, and precision, even when her male colleagues ignore her results. And it is the same scientific discipline she brings into her kitchen. Cooking, for Elizabeth, is chemistry; she measures, calculates, and tests ingredients like she would in a lab. This motif is significant because it shows how, in a patriarchal world filled with indifference and manipulation,</p>

	objective data becomes a feminist act. Elizabeth doesn't need to shout to be heard; she just presents the numbers. And in doing so, she quietly, powerfully, reclaims her space.
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4.2.6. Table 6 Symbols

Table 6 identifies the major symbols used in *Lessons in Chemistry*, interpreting how these objects and images convey deeper meanings related to gender roles, identity, and societal expectations.

Symbol	Researcher's Commentary
Elizabeth's Lab Coat	Elizabeth's lab coat becomes more than her work uniform; it represents who she is and how hard she has worked for it. Every time she wears it, it's like she's reminding everyone that she belongs in the lab, that she has earned her place, even if the men around her try to ignore it. It protects her, not just physically but emotionally, from a world constantly trying to push her into roles she refuses to accept.
Supper at Six	What starts as just a cooking show turns into something so much bigger. Supper at Six is where Elizabeth turns her kitchen into a classroom and teaches chemistry disguised as recipes. Instead of simply following a script, she speaks directly to women and challenges them to think differently about themselves. The show becomes her platform to prove that women's intelligence is not only real but powerful. It's a way of fighting back without yelling, just by showing the truth, one meal at a time, as she said.
Measuring Cups and Beakers	Whether she's baking a cake or balancing a

	<p>chemical reaction, Elizabeth sees these tools the same way: to measure and understand the world. These objects symbolize how she never stops being a scientist, no matter where she is. They're also a reminder that chemistry isn't just something done in labs; chemistry can happen anywhere, even in a kitchen. Elizabeth uses these tools to connect the world of chemistry to everyday life, and in doing so, she shows women they can do both.</p>
The Kitchen	<p>In most stories set in the 1950s, the kitchen is a place where women are expected to cook, clean, and stay silent. But for Elizabeth, the kitchen becomes something else entirely. It's her lab, her workspace, her comfort zone. It's where she builds her future after losing everything. It's also where she starts teaching her daughter and herself that being a woman doesn't mean giving up science or passion. She turns that space into something empowering, something hers.</p>
The Chemistry Lab	<p>This is the place where Elizabeth should have thrived, but instead, it's where she constantly had to fight to be seen and heard. The lab is a symbol of how difficult it is for women to break into male-dominated spaces, even when they're more than qualified. It's a place full of potential and frustration, where science lives, but where sexism also thrives. For Elizabeth, it represents both her dream and her biggest battle.</p>
Elizabeth's dog, Six-Thirty	<p>Six-Thirty is not just a pet, he's a companion, a protector, and one of the few characters who never underestimates Elizabeth. He watches, listens, and learns, proving that intelligence comes</p>

	<p>in many ways. In a story filled with people trying to silence or control Elizabeth, Six-Thirty stands by her side with loyalty and quiet understanding. He's a symbol of love that doesn't judge and supports that doesn't ask for anything in return.</p>
Books	<p>Finally, there are the books, for Elizabeth and later for her daughter; books are the door to another world. They represent everything women have been denied: education, discovery, freedom of thought. Books help her keep going, teach her how to move forward, and remind her that knowledge can never truly be taken away. Whether it's science texts or bedtime stories, the books in the novel stand for the power of learning and the belief that information changes lives.</p>

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Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter will bring together the main ideas explored throughout the investigation and reflect on the significance of the findings concerning the objectives initially proposed. Through the feminist analysis of *Lessons in Chemistry*, the study has aimed to reveal how literature can both reflect and challenge the gender norms rooted in a patriarchal society. By revisiting the themes, motifs, and symbols identified in the previous chapters, this section offers a space for critical reflection on the broader implications of the novel and its contribution to feminist discourse. In addition, this chapter includes a series of recommendations for future research, highlighting possible areas of exploration within feminist literary studies.

5.1 Purpose of the Conclusion

The purpose of this conclusion will be to reflect on the core findings of the investigation and assess how the research objectives have been addressed through the feminist analysis of *Lessons in Chemistry*. This section seeks to bring closure to the study by connecting the literary elements examined, such as themes, motifs, and symbols, with the broader social and cultural realities portrayed in the novel. It also serves as a space to consider the implications of the analysis, not only in terms of the narrative itself but also in the ongoing conversation about gender inequality and the role of literature in challenging oppressive systems.

5.2 Conclusions

This section will present the conclusions drawn from the analysis carried out throughout the study. It will summarize the key insights regarding how *Lessons in Chemistry* addresses and critiques issues related to gender discrimination, societal expectations, and feminist ideals. By reflecting on how the novel's characters, themes, and narrative structure interact with the cultural context of the 1950s and 1960s, these conclusions highlight the significance of the work within both literary and feminist frameworks. This part also emphasizes how the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between gender and power as explored through literature.

5.2.1 Specific objective one: To interpret the character of scientist Elizabeth Zott as a starting point to examine the struggle that professional women endured in a male-dominated environment

Since the main character of the novel is a female scientist navigating a rigid, male-dominated society, Elizabeth Zott acts as a symbolic figure through whom the author exposes the structural limitations imposed on professional women during the 1950s and early 1960s. From the beginning, Elizabeth is portrayed as someone whose intelligence and ambition directly challenge societal expectations, traits that, rather than being celebrated, are perceived as threatening by her male colleagues. Her constant dismissal at the Hastings Research Institute, her lack of recognition despite her clear qualifications, and the repeated attempts to silence her voice all serve to reflect the difficult realities that countless women in similar positions faced and continue to face.

Through Elizabeth's character, *Lessons in Chemistry* of the gendered power dynamics within professional environments, but also invites the reader to question how institutionalized sexism stops innovation and progress. Her rejection of traditional femininity, her refusal to be categorized as subordinate, and her determination to remain true to her scientific identity despite personal and professional costs function as acts of resistance that disrupt the cultural norms of the era. Moreover, her evolution throughout the narrative, marked by loneliness, motherhood, grief, and resilience, illustrates the complex emotional landscape of women who are forced to navigate spaces that are not built for them.

Therefore, interpreting Elizabeth Zott as the main character allows for a deeper understanding of the historical and never-ending struggles women face in male-dominated fields. Her challenging attitude framed not as rebellion but as necessity, underscores the feminist undertones of the novel and reinforces the idea that literature can serve as both a mirror of social injustice and a call for transformative change.

5.2.2 Specific objective two: To explore why society at the time did not accept that a woman could choose between getting married and starting a family or studying and becoming a professional

The cultural and social landscape of the 1950s and early 1960s was defined by rigid expectations regarding femininity, family, and the roles women were meant to fulfill. In *Lessons in Chemistry*, this ideology is a fundamental obstacle against which the protagonist and other female characters must constantly push. The narrative of the novel highlights how polarized the scenario was for women, either to marry and become mothers or to pursue education and careers; there was no other choice. Women were not permitted the freedom to navigate both paths simultaneously; rather, choosing a professional life was perceived as a direct threat to traditional values.

Through other characters, including Elizabeth Zott and supporting figures such as Harriet Sloan and Miss Frask, the novel shows how society punished women who decided not to follow the societal norms imposed. Elizabeth's refusal to marry Calvin Evans, despite how much she loved him, serves as a powerful rejection of the notion that a woman's identity should be anchored to her marital status. Similarly, her struggle as a single mother and her attempt to maintain a career while raising a child without support illustrate the double standard imposed on women who dared to challenge the traditional roles. The narrative implicitly critiques the way ambition and motherhood were framed as mutually exclusive, exposing the emotional draining and social isolation experienced by those who choose a different path.

By analyzing these elements, it becomes evident that the societal resistance to women's autonomy was not merely circumstantial but a reflection of deep-seated patriarchal fears. The novel thus provides a

critique of a culture that restricted women's choices, and in doing so, reclaims the right to redefine what it means to be a woman beyond domesticity, obedience, and sacrifice.

5.2.3 Specific objective three: To demonstrate how the feminist struggle of the 1950s and 1960s impacted the feminist movement of the present era

The feminist undertones presented throughout *Lessons in Chemistry* do not only belong to the past; they echo into the present, revealing the foundational role that the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s played in shaping modern feminist thought. Through the lens of fiction, the novel illustrates how personal resistance, expressed through characters like Elizabeth Zott, became part of a broader collective movement aimed at challenging systemic gender inequality. These acts of resistance, however subtle or personal, reflect the spirit of early feminist advocacy, which laid the groundwork for later political, social, and academic achievements.

By contextualizing Elizabeth's experiences within the historical timeline of the feminist movement, the narrative helps trace the trajectory of progress from private defiance to public change. The obstacles she faces, dismissal from professional spaces, societal judgment, and the amount of criticism of her single motherhood mirror the very concerns that second-wave feminism brought to the forefront: equal pay, reproductive rights, access to education, and the redefinition of women's roles in society. Her insistence on intellectual autonomy and her refusal to be treated as an inferior symbolically align with the foundational values of contemporary feminism, particularly its emphasis on choice, voice, and agency.

Moreover, the novel suggests that the feminist movement of today is the result of the courage and vision of those women who, like Elizabeth Zott, refused to be silenced. Their struggles are not isolated stories of the past but stepping stones toward the broader awareness and legal advancements witnessed in the present. In this sense, *Lessons in Chemistry* becomes not only a historical commentary but also a tribute to the intergenerational nature of feminism, an ongoing journey shaped by past resistance and continued through present action.

5.3 Restatement of the Research Question

How the novel *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus addresses gender stereotypes and the feminist struggle of American women in the 1950s and 1960s?

To understand how *Lessons in Chemistry* addresses gender stereotypes and the feminist struggle of American women in the 1950s and 1960s, it is necessary to examine the broader social and political structures that shaped women's lives during that time. Feminism plays a central role in uncovering these dynamics. As a movement, feminism seeks to challenge systemic inequalities in economic, political, and cultural institutions. Its historical progression, marked by different waves, reflects the evolving goals of women fighting for autonomy, education, reproductive rights, and equal opportunities. Understanding the feminist movements of the 1950s and 1960s helps readers situate Elizabeth Zott's experience within a time when women were expected to conform to rigid roles and discouraged from pursuing professional careers, particularly in male-dominated fields like science.

The novel highlights how these expectations limited women's freedom and potential, not only through Elizabeth's struggles but also through supporting characters who navigate similarly repressive environments. Importantly, the feminist struggle presented in the book is not just about women in isolation. It intersects with issues faced by other marginalized communities, including people of color and queer individuals. The feminist lens used by Garmus allows readers to explore how oppression is both individual and structural, and how resistance can take many forms, public and private, subtle and outspoken.

Finally, *Lessons in Chemistry* gives voice to the feminist struggle of the era. It invites readers not only to witness the limitations women faced but also to empathize with their resistance and resilience. In doing so, the novel becomes more than a story; it becomes a tool for understanding the ongoing fight for gender equality.

5.4 Recommendations

For this last aspect, when analyzing *Lessons in Chemistry*, it is important to pay close attention to the small but meaningful details found in the narration. The book often delivers powerful commentary through subtle cues, such as tone, silence, or internal thoughts, that may at first seem ordinary. However, when viewed collectively, these moments create a deeper understanding of Elizabeth Zott's experience and the limitations placed upon her. Be mindful of how interactions, settings, or even physical gestures reflect the broader societal structure of the 1950s and 1960s. These quiet elements are crucial when building a feminist reading of the text.

As you analyze the characters and themes, keep in mind that many of the issues addressed in the novel, such as gender discrimination, societal expectations, motherhood, and professional ambition, are deeply interconnected. When creating visual aids like charts or tables, make sure to group the information by topic while separating different ideas. This will help prevent overlapping or confusion between concepts that are related but still distinct. For example, a quote about Elizabeth's scientific work may also reflect gender roles, so both dimensions should be acknowledged without losing the main focus of the table.

Lastly, do not forget the importance of literature in current social conversations. Although *Lessons in Chemistry* is set in the past, their themes remain relevant today. Consider how Elizabeth's experiences resonate with modern struggles, particularly for women in science or those balancing career and motherhood. Literature like this does not just reflect the past, it informs the present and encourages ongoing reflection and resistance.

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