



The (Re)production of Gender Inequality in Garmus's Lessons in Chemistry: A Gendered Organization Analysis

Meyla Aqshal Rosihan¹, Imas Istiani²

^{1,2} English Literature Study Program, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Jawa
Tengah

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-09-05 Keywords: <i>Gender Inequality;</i> <i>Gendered Organization;</i> <i>Inequality Reproduction,</i> <i>Lessons In Chemistry</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.10981 Corresponding Author: Meyla Aqshal Rosihan meylaaqshal9@gmail.com English Literature Study Program, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Jawa Tengah	<i>Although previous studies on Bonnie Garmus's Lessons in Chemistry have primarily examined the novel through feminist perspectives, limited attention has been given to how organizational structures systematically construct and reproduce gender inequality. This study examines Bonnie Garmus's Lessons in Chemistry through Joan Acker's theory of gendered organization and inequality regimes to identify how gender inequality is constructed, maintained, and reproduced within organizational contexts. Using a qualitative descriptive design, with Lessons in Chemistry (2022) as the primary data source, this study adopts a socio-organizational perspective, which differs from previous studies that mainly focused on feminist approaches. Findings reveal that gender inequality is not rooted in individual actions but in a self-reinforcing organizational system. This inequality is represented through five interconnected dimensions of gendered organization: division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interaction, identity formation, and organizational logic. Together, these dimensions demonstrate how organizational structures sustain male dominance while maintaining the appearance of meritocracy. This process operates on multiple levels, such as labeling women domestically, disregarding their contributions, excluding them from authority positions, and seeing men as the only ideal workers. Further analysis of inequality regimes reveals that this inequality is perpetuated through an interlocking mechanism. Naturalized through long-standing social norms and supported by biased daily</i>

organizational practices, it becomes a system that appears normal and difficult to change. Although several forms of women's resistance are portrayed in the novel, such resistance tends to be largely individual and limited in its capacity to disrupt patriarchal structures and broader organizational inequalities. By integrating literary criticism with organizational sociology, this study extends the application of Joan Acker's framework to literary analysis while demonstrating how literary narratives can illuminate structural mechanisms of gender inequality in organizational contexts.

1. Introduction

Gender inequality in many professional settings is often reduced to a question of numbers, as if representation alone could explain the persistence of disparity. However, it certainly does not fully capture how inequality has gradually become entrenched inside organizations. This issue often occurs in male-dominated workplaces such as scientific institutions (Gunawan et al., 2022; Soleman, 2020). While organizations tend to claim neutrality on the surface, they appear to undermine merit-based systems that rely on objective evaluation (Coe et al., 2019). The International Labor Organization (2023) reports that women are concentrated in administrative, services, and care work, while men dominate engineering, construction, and machinery-related work (Gabarrot, 2025; Reilly et al., 2016). Furthermore, women account for only 36% of managerial positions, with 20% of them serving as CEOs (UNESCO, 2024). This fact reveals that the organization itself already exhibits gender barriers, which disadvantage women in recruitment, career advancement, recognition, and workplace relations (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023).

Society holds certain expectations of how women should behave and perform their jobs. Women are commonly stereotyped as caring and emotional, whereas men are associated with authority and rationality. Such stereotypes influence organizational practices by shaping competence assessments, leadership expectations, and workplace interactions (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Discrimination against women is boundless; whether they come from low socioeconomic backgrounds or are highly educated, they are often dealt with unfairly (Shofa & Istiani, 2025). Women may receive less recognition despite having similar or better abilities, face exclusion, and suffer from harassment. Such a condition reflects "perfection bias," where women are pressured to be "perfect"

so they can be considered worthy or competent (Cabezas-Clavijo & Salido-Fernández, 2026; Panerati et al., 2025; Ross et al., 2022). These practices often recur with limited awareness in the workplace, are taken for granted, and thus, constantly reproduce themselves inside organizations.

This issue can be connected to the concept of gendered organizations as developed by Joan Acker (1990) in *"Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations."* Acker stated that an organization is never truly gender-neutral. The workplace system is built on hegemonic masculinity that enforces double standards in the workplace, even when they may seem objective and fair. There are five intersecting dimensions of gendered organization: division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interactions, identity formation, and organizational logic. Division of labor refers to gender-biased task allocation that often leads to women's occupational segregation.

Symbolic representation deals with the stereotypes and social images, as masculinity is tied to authority and competence, and femininity is tied to sentimentality or dependence. Another dimension is workplace interaction, which refers to everyday treatment inside organizations that may include interruptions or different expectations toward women workers. Acker also discusses identity formation, where individuals gradually shape their self-identity in response to gender expectations in the workplace.

Lastly, organizational logic is interpreted as a hidden belief that masculine values are considered normal standards in organizations. Each of these dimensions provides a framework for examining how inequality is produced and initially constructed inside organizations. Acker (2006) further expands this theory through the concept of inequality regimes, which posits inequality as a self-perpetuating system, supported by continually reinforced societal norms, often making inequality obscured in daily organizational life. The lack of critical questioning in society allows unequal practices to continue in subtle forms over time.

Although Acker originally developed these concepts to explain inequality within real organizational settings, her framework is equally valuable for literary analysis because literary narratives frequently portray institutional structures, workplace practices, and power relations that mirror social reality. Through fictional representation, novels can reveal how organizational norms and gendered power relations are constructed, normalized, and reproduced, making Acker's theory particularly suitable for examining organizational inequality in literary texts.

These persistent organizational inequalities are not only observable in contemporary workplaces but are also reflected in literary narratives, which provide a critical space for examining how institutional power and gender relations are represented. The topic of gender inequality is raised in Bonnie Garmus's novel, *Lessons in Chemistry* (2022). Garmus portrays the main protagonist, Elizabeth Zott, as a female chemist working in a male-dominated environment characterized by masculinity and authority. The novel strongly highlights a workplace culture rooted in patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices that limit women's opportunities in the professional field. At work, Zott faces discrimination, exclusion, unfair treatment, a lack of recognition for her contributions, and even sexual harassment. Most of the inequality Zott experiences occurs in daily workplace interactions at the scientific (Hastings Research Institute) and media-related (KCTV) institutions.

Previous studies on *Lessons in Chemistry* have primarily examined the novel from feminist perspectives, focusing on sexism, patriarchal power, workplace discrimination, women's resistance, characterization, and identity (Steiner, 2022; Kalynych, 2024; Arahmah, 2024; Patya, 2025; Syafitri & Takenova, 2025; Safitri & Nur Ali, 2025). These studies are broadly situated within the tradition of feminist literary criticism, which examines how literary texts represent patriarchal ideology, women's experiences, and gendered power relations (Showalter, 1979; Millett, 1970). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that the novel critiques patriarchal oppression and unequal gender relations. However, they largely interpret inequality as an interpersonal or ideological issue, while paying limited attention to the organizational structures and institutional processes through which gender inequality is systematically produced and reproduced. Likewise, the application of Joan Acker's theories of gendered organizations and inequality regimes remains largely unexplored within literary criticism.

To address this gap, the present study analyzes *Lessons in Chemistry* using Joan Acker's theories of gendered organizations and inequality regimes to explain how organizational structures systematically construct and reproduce gender inequality. To clarify the relationship between the theoretical framework and the object of analysis, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study.

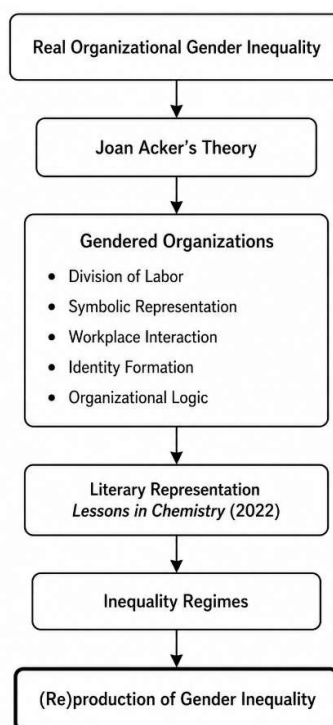


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

2. Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design to gain deeper insight into how social phenomena unfold by analyzing descriptive text data rather than numerical data (Usman et al., 2025). A descriptive qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because the objective of this study was not to quantify literary elements or compare linguistic patterns, but to interpret how gender inequality is represented through organizational structures, social interactions, and institutional practices within the narrative. This approach allows an in-depth interpretation of textual meanings while preserving the contextual complexity of the literary work. A socio-organizational perspective also applies to examining the social structures and organizational practices that contribute to gender inequality. This analysis is based on Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations (1990) and inequality regimes (2006). Within the analytical process, Acker's five dimensions of gendered organizations—division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interaction, identity formation, and organizational logic—served as the primary coding categories for organizing and interpreting the textual data. The concept of inequality regimes was subsequently applied to explain how these organizational practices collectively reproduce gender inequality throughout the narrative.

Data Collection

The primary data source of this study is Bonnie Garmus's *Lessons in Chemistry* (2022). The data consist of dialogues and narrative passages that reflect Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations (1990) and inequality regimes (2006). The excerpts were selected purposively based on their explicit representation of organizational practices, gender relations, power dynamics, or institutional norms corresponding to one or more analytical categories derived from Acker's framework. Passages unrelated to the research objectives were excluded from the analysis.

Certain analyses combine dialogue excerpts and narrative passages to capture broader patterns of gender inequality represented throughout the novel. The collected data encompass the five dimensions of gendered organizations: division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interaction, identity formation, and organizational logic which serve as the primary analytical categories for examining how gender inequality is systematically constructed within organizational settings.

Data related to inequality regimes were also collected to reveal how organizational practices collectively reproduce gender inequality. To strengthen the analytical framework, secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies on gender studies, feminist literary criticism, gendered organizations, and structural inequality.

To collect the data, a close reading technique was employed. The researcher first read the novel repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative, characters, and organizational contexts. Subsequently, note-taking techniques were used to identify and record dialogues and narrative passages relevant to the five dimensions of gendered organizations and the mechanisms of inequality reproduction. These selected excerpts constituted the primary corpus for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected excerpts were analyzed through several stages. First, the selected textual data were systematically coded according to the five dimensions of gendered organizations: division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interaction, identity formation, and organizational logic. Second, excerpts sharing similar organizational characteristics were grouped into thematic categories to identify recurring patterns of gender inequality.

Third, each category was interpreted using Joan Acker's theories of gendered organizations (1990) and inequality regimes (2006) to explain how organizational structures construct, normalize, and reproduce gender inequality within the narrative. Finally, the findings were synthesized to identify broader patterns of organizational inequality represented throughout the novel and to explain how these patterns collectively reinforce the reproduction of gender inequality across

organizational contexts. To enhance the analytical rigor of the study, an audit trail was maintained by documenting each stage of data selection, coding, categorization, and interpretation. In addition, theoretical triangulation was employed by interpreting the findings through the complementary perspectives of gendered organizations and inequality regimes. These procedures ensured that the analysis remained systematic, transparent, and theoretically grounded.

Table 1. Analytical Coding Framework

Coding Stage	Analytical Activity	Output
Close reading	Reading the novel repeatedly	Relevant excerpts identified
Open coding	Coding dialogues and narration	Initial codes
Categorization	Grouping excerpts into Acker's five dimensions	Five analytical categories
Interpretation	Applying Gendered Organization and Inequality Regimes	Organizational meanings
Synthesis	Comparing patterns across findings	Overall interpretation

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings through Joan Acker's theories of gendered organizations (1990) and inequality regimes (2006) to examine how *Lessons in Chemistry* represents the structural reproduction of gender inequality within organizational settings. Rather than portraying discrimination as isolated interpersonal incidents, the novel reveals how organizational practices and institutional norms collectively sustain gender inequality across workplace contexts. Although the Hastings Research Institute serves as the primary setting, similar organizational patterns also emerge in KCTV, indicating that gender inequality extends beyond scientific institutions into the media industry. The findings are organized into two interconnected parts. The first examines how the five dimensions of gendered organizations, division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interaction, identity formation, and organizational logic, construct gender inequality within the narrative. The second explains how these dimensions collectively form inequality regimes that sustain structural gender inequality.

Dimensions of Gendered Organizations

Referring to Acker (1990), organizations cannot be considered gender-neutral since the structures within them tend to prioritize hegemonic masculinity as the ideal standard. Masculine values become the implicit norm inside the organization, and they contradict feminine traits, which are treated as less important. These assumptions eventually create unequal conditions between men

and women. In the context of *Lessons in Chemistry*, the Hastings Research Institute is portrayed as an institution with strong male dominance. Besides that, KCTV (the television industry) also becomes an institution that normalizes discrimination against women. In the novel, the organizational system works to maintain male authority, and women are placed in subordinate or less powerful roles. This inequality appears through five connected dimensions:

Division of Labor

Division of labor constitutes the first dimension of gendered organizations identified in the novel. According to Acker (1990), organizational structures allocate tasks in ways that appear neutral but systematically assign women to supportive, administrative, or caregiving roles while positioning men as more suitable for leadership and decision-making. Such divisions reinforce unequal access to authority and professional advancement (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2019). In *Lessons in Chemistry*, this organizational pattern is represented through the routine assignment of domestic and supportive responsibilities to female characters despite their professional competence. Viewed through Acker's concept of inequality regimes (2006), these everyday practices function as organizational mechanisms that normalize male dominance by embedding gender inequality into ordinary workplace routines rather than through explicit discriminatory policies.

Datum 1

"Here," Donatti said, handing her a huge stack of papers. "Start by typing these. Also, we're low on coffee. And talk to each of the fellas—see what kind of support they need." (Garmus, 2022, p. 171)

Datum 1 illustrates how organizational practices institutionalize a gendered division of labor by assigning Elizabeth Zott administrative and caregiving responsibilities instead of scientific work. Rather than reflecting her actual competence, these tasks position her within a supportive role that conforms to patriarchal organizational expectations. Although presented as routine workplace requests, such assignments operate as structural mechanisms that gradually redefine women's professional identity and restrict opportunities for scientific recognition. From the perspective of Acker's inequality regimes (2006), these seemingly ordinary practices become organizational strategies that reproduce unequal power relations by normalizing women's subordinate positions within the institution.

Datum 2

"Elizabeth," he said. "This is a job. You have two duties: to smile and read cue cards. That's it. You don't get to have an opinion about the set or the cards." (Garmus, 2022, p. 215)

Datum 2 demonstrates that the organizational logic observed at Hastings Research Institute is reproduced within the media industry. Although Elizabeth Zott enters KCTV as a television presenter, her professional expertise as a chemist is subordinated to gendered expectations emphasizing obedience, attractiveness, and domesticity. This shift illustrates that different organizational settings may employ distinct practices while sustaining the same structural assumptions regarding women's roles. Rather than recognizing scientific competence as the basis of professional authority, the organization reconstructs Zott's identity according to commercially desirable feminine stereotypes. Nevertheless, Zott challenges this organizational logic by transforming the cooking program into a platform for scientific education, thereby resisting the institutional mechanisms that seek to confine women to subordinate positions.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the gendered division of labor in *Lessons in Chemistry* operates not as a series of isolated discriminatory acts but as an organizational mechanism that systematically allocates authority, visibility, and professional recognition along gendered lines. This dimension establishes the structural foundation upon which broader patterns of organizational inequality are subsequently reproduced throughout the narrative. Unlike previous literary studies on *Lessons in Chemistry*, which primarily interpret Elizabeth Zott's experiences as manifestations of patriarchal oppression and individual resistance, the present study demonstrates that these experiences are embedded within organizational structures that systematically allocate authority, professional roles, and opportunities according to gender. By applying Acker's theory, gender inequality is understood not merely as interpersonal discrimination but as an institutional process of organizational reproduction. While the division of labor determines how organizational responsibilities are allocated, gender inequality is further reinforced through symbolic meanings that shape how women are perceived and valued within organizational settings.

Symbolic Representation

The second dimension concerns symbolic representation, through which organizations reproduce gender inequality by embedding patriarchal assumptions into language, labels, metaphors, and institutional narratives (Acker, 1990). Rather than functioning as neutral descriptions, these symbolic constructions define how women are perceived, evaluated, and positioned within organizational settings. In *Lessons in Chemistry*, women are repeatedly represented through stereotypes emphasizing appearance, emotion, and dependency, while their professional competence is systematically diminished. Consequently, symbolic representation functions not merely as a reflection of gender bias but as an organizational mechanism that legitimizes unequal power relations and reinforces women's subordinate status (Prihatina & Istiani, 2025).

Datum 3

Zott? Oh wait—you mean ‘Luscious Lizzie’? ... ‘Luscious was a great lab tech—that’s a position we have for people who want to be in science but don’t have the brains.’” (Garmus, 2022, p. 327)

Datum 3 demonstrates how symbolic representation operates by redefining Elizabeth Zott's professional identity through gendered labels rather than scientific achievement. The nickname “Luscious Lizzie” reduces a competent chemist to a sexualized object, while the dismissive reference to women “not actually protesting” reinforces the stereotype that female voices lack legitimacy and autonomy. Likewise, describing her as merely a “lab tech” establishes an intellectual hierarchy that implicitly excludes women from the category of “real” scientists. From Acker's perspective (1990), these symbolic practices do more than demean individuals; they institutionalize organizational meanings that normalize women's marginalization and legitimize unequal access to authority and recognition.

Datum 4

The article opened with Roth's line about her being the most intelligent person on television today, except the editor had swapped out “intelligent” and replaced it with “attractive.” (Garmus, 2022, p. 326)

Datum 4 illustrates how media organizations reproduce symbolic inequality by redefining women's public value through physical attractiveness rather than intellectual achievement. Replacing the word “intelligent” with “attractive” is not merely an editorial decision but a symbolic reconstruction of professional identity. The alteration redirects public recognition away from Elizabeth Zott's scientific expertise and toward conventional standards of femininity. Such representations reinforce patriarchal organizational expectations by suggesting that women's visibility depends more on appearance than competence, thereby legitimizing gendered inequalities within professional environments.

Datum 5

“You know what to do. Big hair, tight dresses ... ‘the sexy-wife-loving-mother every man wants to see.’” (Garmus, 2022, p. 204)

Datum 5 further demonstrates that symbolic representation extends beyond language to organizational expectations regarding women's ideal public identity. The instructions to create a “big hair, tight dresses, homey set” and a “sexy-wife-loving-mother” image illustrate how media institutions actively construct femininity according to patriarchal ideals. Rather than allowing women to define their own professional identities, the organization determines which feminine characteristics are commercially acceptable and socially desirable. Consequently, scientific authority is displaced by visual appeal and domesticity, revealing how

symbolic representation functions as an organizational strategy for regulating women's public roles and reinforcing structural gender inequality.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that symbolic representation is not simply a matter of individual prejudice or biased language. Instead, it functions as an organizational mechanism that shapes institutional perceptions of competence, legitimacy, and authority, thereby reinforcing the structural conditions that sustain gender inequality across different organizational contexts. While symbolic representations shape how women are perceived within organizations, these meanings become embedded and reinforced through everyday workplace interactions that regulate authority, communication, and professional legitimacy.

Workplace Interaction

The third dimension of gendered organizations concerns workplace interaction, which refers to the everyday communication and social practices through which organizational power relations are maintained (Acker, 1990). Although these interactions often appear routine or informal, they play a significant role in reinforcing gender hierarchies by shaping whose voices are heard, respected, and considered credible within the workplace. In *Lessons in Chemistry*, discrimination is repeatedly enacted through ordinary conversations, dismissive remarks, interruptions, and verbal degradation directed at female characters. These recurring interactions normalize male authority while simultaneously undermining women's professional competence and legitimacy (Casad et al., 2021).

Datum 6

"You're also a scientist, is that right?" he asked from the other end of her body.

"Yes."

"And Hastings kept you on. They must be more progressive than I thought." (Garmus, 2022, p. 129)

Datum 6 illustrates how seemingly polite workplace conversations can reinforce organizational inequality. Although the speaker initially acknowledges Elizabeth Zott as a scientist, the subsequent remark implies that her presence is exceptional rather than normal within a scientific institution. Consequently, her professional legitimacy is presented as dependent on organizational acceptance instead of scientific competence. From Acker's perspective (1990), such interactions function as subtle organizational practices that continually position women as outsiders whose participation requires institutional approval, thereby reinforcing gendered organizational boundaries.

Datum 7

"Someone ought to put her in her place," said one.

"She's not even that smart," insisted another.

"She's a cunt," declared a familiar voice. Her boss, Donnati. (Garmus, 2022, p. 21)

Datum 7 demonstrates how informal workplace interactions become mechanisms for enforcing gender hierarchy. Statements such as "Someone ought to put her in her place" reveal that organizational expectations already assign women to subordinate positions, making Elizabeth Zott's professional confidence appear as a violation of accepted norms. The subsequent insults questioning her intelligence and culminating in explicit verbal abuse from Donatti illustrate that organizational authority legitimizes rather than challenges discriminatory behavior. According to Acker (1990), these repeated interactions institutionalize unequal power relations by normalizing hostility toward women who challenge masculine organizational dominance.

Datum 8

"You're overreacting, Miss Zott," he said, pausing to squeeze the top of her shoulder. "Abiogenesis is more of a PhD-university-this-topic-is-so-boring-no-one-cares sort of thing. And don't take this the wrong way, but it exceeds your intellectual grasp." (Garmus, 2022, p. 75)

Datum 8 further demonstrates how workplace interaction is used to delegitimize women's intellectual authority. By dismissing Elizabeth Zott's scientific ideas as exceeding her "intellectual grasp," the interaction shifts attention away from the substance of her argument toward assumptions about her gender. Rather than evaluating scientific evidence objectively, organizational members rely on patriarchal beliefs that associate expertise and authority with masculinity. Such everyday interactions discourage women's participation in professional discourse and reinforce the perception that scientific competence is inherently male.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that workplace interaction functions as more than interpersonal communication. Instead, it operates as an organizational mechanism through which gender hierarchies are continually reinforced, professional authority is selectively legitimized, and women's participation is systematically constrained. These everyday practices contribute directly to the broader reproduction of structural gender inequality within organizational settings. As these recurring workplace interactions shape how women are treated within organizations, they also influence how women understand, negotiate, and construct their own professional identities. This process is reflected in the next dimension, identity formation.

Identity Formation

The fourth dimension of gendered organizations concerns identity formation, referring to the ways organizational norms shape how individuals understand and perform their professional and gender identities (Acker, 1990). Rather than

emerging solely from personal choice, identity is constructed through continuous organizational expectations that define appropriate roles for women and men. In *Lessons in Chemistry*, female characters experience persistent pressure to prioritize marriage, motherhood, and domestic responsibilities over professional achievement. These expectations create tension between personal aspirations and socially prescribed gender roles, illustrating how organizational culture contributes to the construction and regulation of women's identities.

Datum 9

"And there are a lot of nice men, good-looking men. One of them is sure to put a ring on your finger." She paused... "And once you find one," she said, "maybe a lawyer," she specified, "then you can stop all this science nonsense and go home and have lots of babies." (Garmus, 2022, p. 105)

Datum 9 illustrates how patriarchal organizational values become internalized and reproduced by women themselves. Frask's advice reflects the belief that a woman's primary fulfillment lies in marriage and motherhood rather than scientific achievement. Rather than expressing an individual opinion, her statement reproduces broader institutional expectations that define domesticity as women's natural role. From Acker's perspective (1990), identity formation is sustained not only through formal organizational policies but also through social interactions that encourage women to conform voluntarily to gendered norms. Consequently, patriarchal ideology becomes self-reinforcing as it is reproduced by individuals who have internalized organizational expectations.

Datum 10

"I've never pretended to be a man, Frask!"

"And I'm not a panderer!"

"I'm a chemist. Not a woman chemist. A chemist. A damn good one!" (Garmus, 2022, p. 175)

Datum 10 represents Elizabeth Zott's resistance to organizational identity construction. By declaring herself "a chemist" rather than "a woman chemist," she rejects gender-based categorization as the basis of professional recognition. Her statement challenges the assumption that scientific competence should be interpreted through gendered labels and instead demands evaluation based on expertise alone. However, the necessity of explicitly asserting this identity also demonstrates the strength of organizational norms that continually define women through patriarchal expectations. Thus, resistance itself becomes evidence of how deeply gendered organizational identities are embedded within institutional structures.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that identity formation is not merely an individual psychological process but an organizational mechanism through which gender norms are internalized, negotiated, and sometimes resisted. By regulating

how women perceive themselves and are perceived by others, organizational expectations contribute to the continued reproduction of structural gender inequality. While identity formation shapes how individuals understand their place within organizations, these identities are ultimately sustained by deeper institutional assumptions regarding competence, authority, and legitimacy. These underlying assumptions are reflected in the final dimension, organizational logic.

Organizational Logic

The fifth dimension of gendered organizations is organizational logic, which refers to the underlying assumptions that define who is considered competent, legitimate, and worthy of authority within an institution (Acker, 1990; Newman et al., 2017). These assumptions often appear objective and value-neutral, yet they are embedded in organizational routines, policies, and workplace culture, making gender inequality seem natural and unquestionable. In *Lessons in Chemistry*, organizational logic consistently privileges masculine authority while positioning women's competence as exceptional or secondary. Consequently, discriminatory practices are normalized as ordinary organizational procedures rather than recognized as structural inequalities.

Datum 11

"I mean by artificial cultural and religious policies that put men in the highly unnatural role of single-sex leadership. Even a basic understanding of chemistry reveals the danger of such a lopsided approach." (Garmus, 2022, p. 323)

Datum 11 illustrates Elizabeth Zott's recognition that male dominance is not a natural condition but a product of institutional arrangements maintained through cultural and organizational norms. By questioning policies that privilege single-sex leadership, she challenges the legitimacy of organizational assumptions that equate masculinity with authority. From Acker's perspective (1990), organizational logic operates precisely by presenting these assumptions as objective truths, thereby concealing the structural processes through which gender inequality is reproduced. Zott's critique therefore exposes the ideological foundations of organizational power rather than merely opposing individual acts of discrimination.

Datum 12

"...In your home, you are that base. It is ... 'the most undervalued job in the world.'" (Garmus, 2022, p. 254)

Datum 12 further demonstrates how organizational logic shapes the social value assigned to women's labor. By describing domestic work as "the most undervalued job in the world," Zott challenges the institutional assumption that

productive labor is limited to paid employment traditionally associated with men. Her statement redefines domestic work as socially indispensable while exposing the organizational logic that systematically devalues reproductive and caregiving labor. The audience's positive response further suggests that these assumptions have long been internalized, illustrating how organizational norms influence not only institutional practices but also public perceptions of women's contributions.

Datum 13

"Because I can't risk having my scientific contributions submerged beneath your name. ... Everything I do will suddenly be in your name, as if you'd done it. In fact, most people will assume you've done it simply because you're a man, but especially because you're Calvin Evans." (Garmus, 2022, pp. 57-58)

Datum 13 reveals that organizational logic extends beyond formal workplace practices to the broader social recognition of professional achievement. Elizabeth Zott's concern that her scientific contributions would automatically be attributed to Calvin reflects an institutional assumption that associates authority, expertise, and intellectual ownership with men. Although Calvin himself does not seek such recognition, the organizational system is structured in ways that privilege male identity over female accomplishment. This illustrates that organizational logic reproduces inequality not only through explicit discrimination but also through deeply embedded assumptions regarding credibility and authorship.

Datum 14

"Don't work the system. Outsmart it." ... "Why couldn't they just be smart in the first place?" (Garmus, 2022, p.32)

Datum 14 highlights the resilience of organizational logic by illustrating how individuals often adapt to unequal systems rather than attempting to transform them. Calvin's advice to "outsmart" the system acknowledges the persistence of institutional inequality while simultaneously accepting its existence as unavoidable. In contrast, Elizabeth questions why such systems should remain unquestioned, thereby exposing the possibility of challenging organizational norms rather than merely navigating them. This dialogue demonstrates that organizational logic is sustained because discriminatory structures become normalized and are perceived as inevitable features of institutional life.

Datum 15

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." (Garmus, 2022, p. 180)

Datum 15 demonstrates how organizational logic institutionalizes gender inequality through assumptions regarding women's reproductive roles. The belief

that women are poor organizational investments because they may become mothers reflects the construction of the “ideal worker” as someone free from caregiving responsibilities. Such assumptions privilege masculine career trajectories while positioning women's biological and family responsibilities as organizational liabilities. Consequently, gender discrimination becomes embedded within institutional decision-making processes long before individual women are evaluated on the basis of their actual competence or performance.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that organizational logic constitutes the deepest structural dimension of gendered organizations. By shaping institutional assumptions about competence, authority, and legitimacy, it normalizes discriminatory practices and provides the ideological foundation through which gender inequality is continuously reproduced across organizational contexts. While the five dimensions of gendered organizations explain how inequality is constructed through everyday organizational practices, these interconnected processes ultimately operate as broader inequality regimes that sustain and reproduce structural gender inequality over time.

Mechanism of Inequality Production

Beyond the five dimensions of gendered organizations, the findings demonstrate how these interconnected organizational processes collectively form inequality regimes that sustain structural gender inequality over time (Acker, 2006). Rather than operating as isolated discriminatory practices, occupational segregation, unequal remuneration, sexual harassment, and institutional exclusion function as mutually reinforcing mechanisms that regulate women's access to authority, resources, and professional recognition. In *Lessons in Chemistry*, these mechanisms are consistently represented across organizational settings, illustrating that gender inequality is embedded within institutional structures rather than resulting solely from individual prejudice.

Datum 16

“...you might be the only woman at Hastings ... we ladies aren't a good investment ... because we're always running off and having babies.” (Garmus, 2022, p.176)

Datum 16 illustrates occupational segregation as a structural mechanism through which inequality regimes restrict women's participation in scientific organizations. Elizabeth Zott's exceptional status as the only female scientist at Hastings demonstrates that exclusion is institutional rather than incidental. The assumption that women constitute poor organizational investments because of their reproductive roles reflects organizational policies that privilege uninterrupted male career trajectories. From Acker's perspective (2006), such assumptions reinforce inequality regimes by systematically limiting women's opportunities for recruitment, promotion, and professional advancement.

Datum 17

He already knew she couldn't pay half. She couldn't even pay a quarter. This was because Hastings paid her a penurious wage—about half what a man in her position made— a fact he'd encountered in her personnel file, which he'd peeked at illegally. (Garmus, 2022, p. 44)

Datum 17 demonstrates that inequality regimes extend beyond occupational segregation to economic inequality. Despite performing scientific work comparable to her male colleagues, Elizabeth receives substantially lower wages, indicating that organizational reward systems are structured according to gender rather than merit. The illegal access to her personnel file further illustrates how organizational authority exploits women's economic vulnerability to reinforce dependency and maintain unequal power relations. Consequently, economic inequality functions not merely as an outcome of discrimination but as an institutional mechanism that reproduces women's subordinate position within the organization.

Datum 18

"Because I was sexually violated by my thesis advisor, then kicked out of the doctoral program," she shouted. "You?"

Frask looked back, shocked. "Same." (Garmus, 2022, p. 181)

Datum 18 reveals sexual harassment as one of the most pervasive mechanisms sustaining inequality regimes. The shared experiences of Elizabeth and Frask demonstrate that sexual violence is not presented as an isolated incident but as a recurring organizational practice that protects perpetrators while marginalizing victims. Frask's eventual acceptance of organizational norms further illustrates how institutional inequality can become internalized by those subjected to it. Thus, inequality regimes reproduce themselves not only through formal organizational structures but also through the normalization of gender-based violence and the silencing of women's experiences. These findings further indicate that gender inequality is reinforced through institutional hierarchy, where individuals occupying positions of organizational authority possess greater power to determine legitimacy, allocate professional opportunities, and regulate women's career trajectories.

Datum 19

"I'm amazed you have to ask. I may have considerable assets, but like most women in the world, my hands are tied. I can't even write a check unless Wilson cosigns." (Garmus, 2022, p. 365)

Datum 19 demonstrates that inequality regimes extend beyond workplace organizations into broader legal and economic institutions. Women's inability to exercise financial authority independently illustrates how patriarchal

organizational principles are reinforced through legal regulations governing property and economic decision-making. Consequently, organizational inequality is sustained across multiple institutional domains, ensuring that women's dependence is reproduced not only within workplaces but also through wider social and legal structures. These findings further resonate with the Matilda Effect, whereby women's contributions, authority, and autonomy are systematically diminished despite their demonstrated competence.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that gender inequality in *Lessons in Chemistry* is reproduced through interconnected organizational mechanisms rather than isolated discriminatory events. The five dimensions of gendered organizations provide the processes through which inequality is constructed in everyday organizational life, while inequality regimes explain how these processes become institutionalized and self-sustaining over time. Together, these findings illustrate that organizational structures systematically regulate women's access to authority, recognition, economic resources, and professional advancement, thereby reinforcing the continuous reproduction of structural gender inequality across different institutional contexts.

These findings also extend previous literary analyses by demonstrating that the novel does not merely criticize patriarchal attitudes toward women but illustrates how organizational structures continuously reproduce gender inequality through interconnected institutional mechanisms. Consequently, the present study contributes a sociological perspective that complements existing feminist literary interpretations of *Lessons in Chemistry*. Beyond literary criticism, these findings also contribute to organizational studies by illustrating how literary narratives can serve as critical representations of organizational processes that normalize and reproduce structural gender inequality. The novel therefore provides insight into the everyday mechanisms through which organizational cultures, institutional norms, and workplace practices collectively sustain unequal gender relations across different professional settings.

Table 2. Summary of Findings Based on Joan Acker's Framework

Current	Better
Administrative tasks assigned to Elizabeth	Administrative and caregiving tasks assigned to Elizabeth Zott
Women are positioned in supportive roles	Organizational allocation of women to supportive roles
Ideal worker associated with men	Construction of the male "ideal worker"
Multiple organizational mechanisms interact	Interconnected organizational mechanisms sustain inequality

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Lessons in Chemistry* represents gender inequality not merely as a series of individual discriminatory experiences but as a structural phenomenon embedded within organizational practices and institutional norms. Through Joan Acker's theories of gendered organizations and inequality regimes, the novel reveals that gender inequality is systematically constructed through five interconnected organizational dimensions: division of labor, symbolic representation, workplace interaction, identity formation, and organizational logic. These dimensions collectively operate as organizational mechanisms that normalize unequal access to authority, professional recognition, and economic resources, thereby sustaining the continuous reproduction of gender inequality across scientific and media institutions.

The findings contribute to feminist literary criticism by extending the interpretation of Elizabeth Zott's experiences beyond individual resistance toward an analysis of the organizational structures that produce and reproduce gender inequality. At the same time, this study contributes to organizational sociology by demonstrating that literary narratives can function as critical representations of organizational processes, offering valuable insights into how institutional norms, workplace practices, and power relations shape gender inequality. This interdisciplinary perspective highlights the potential of literary texts to enrich organizational research while expanding the analytical scope of feminist literary studies.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on a fictional narrative, which represents organizational realities through literary construction rather than empirical observation. Consequently, the findings should be understood as an interpretation of organizational representations instead of direct evidence of actual workplace practices. Future research is encouraged to apply organizational theories to other literary works depicting workplace dynamics or to compare literary representations with empirical organizational studies in order to further examine how organizational structures reproduce gender inequality across different institutional and cultural contexts. Such studies would strengthen the dialogue between literary criticism and organizational sociology and further develop interdisciplinary approaches to gender studies.

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