

**USING FEMINIST THEORY AS A LENS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH****Joan Nkansaa Nkansah, EdD**

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**Abstract**

*This article is a blueprint for using feminist theory as a lens in educational research. Feminist theory explores how systems of power and oppression interact. The theory highlights social issues overlooked or misidentified by society because they appear natural and reasonable to the dominant perspective. The feminist theory can be used to analyze women's social experiences with gender subordination, oppression, and gender inequality and to identify remedies to these gender-specific discrimination issues. The paper provides an in-depth literature review of the feminist theory while applying the theory to a contemporary research topic. The article explores the origin of feminism, how the feminist movements birthed the feminist theory, and how the feminist theory can be considered feminism extending into philosophical or theoretical fields. The paper further explores how the gender constructs of the feminist theory (gender inequality, gender oppression, gender roles, gender objectification, and gender division of labor) can be used to explore the experiences of women leaders in the contemporary organizational setting.*

**Keywords***Educational Research,**Feminism,**Feminist Theory,**Theoretical Framework.***1. Introduction**

Feminism, over the years, has been used to describe a movement that may be cultural, economic, or political and advocates for women's equal rights and protection (Harrison & Boyd, 2018; Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014). However, feminism extends to include sociological theories that focus on gender differences in addition to the advocacy for gender equality and protection of women's rights and interests (Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). Prominent feminists such as Rebecca Walker and Maggie Humm argued that the evolution of feminism can be divided into three waves or movements (Harrison & Boyd, 2018; Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). These waves throughout history have made significant strides toward achieving gender equality, protection, and justice for women in society (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005; Lumen, n.d.). From these movements emerged the feminist theory, which has manifested in multiple disciplines including sociology, geography, history, and literary criticism.

Feminist theory explores how systems of power and oppression interact (Crossman, 2018; Khan, 2014). The theory highlights social trends, problems, and issues that appear natural and reasonable and therefore are overlooked or misidentified by a society historically based on the dominant male perspective (Crossman, 2018; Tong, 1998). Thus, the theory analyzes women's social experiences with gender subordination, oppression, and gender inequality and identifies remedies for some gender-specific discrimination issues.

This article provides a blueprint for using feminist theory as a lens in educational research. The paper presents an in-depth literature review of feminist theory and uses the theory as a lens to explore a contemporary educational research topic. This paper begins with a discussion of feminism, the background, proponents, and core tenets of feminist theory. Next, the paper reviews five peer-reviewed journal articles that demonstrate how scholars in the literature have used feminist theory. Additionally, the paper addresses the critiques of feminist theory by some scholars. The paper further explores the aspects of the feminist theory that have been applied to the proposed research study and provides the rationale for using the theory in this contemporary setting.

**Implications for Academic Scholarship and Research**

This paper can guide researchers using feminist theory as a theoretical framework or foundation for educational research. Grant and Osanloo (2014) advocated defining a clear path and structure for investigating a research problem. However, understanding and integrating the theoretical framework into research can be laborious, especially for novice researchers. This paper assists with examining the relationships between theoretical constructs.

Eisenhart (1991) explained a theoretical framework as "a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory" (p. 205). A theoretical framework creates a clear vision for the successful execution of research. Theory-

driven research requires carefully aligning the topic, problem, purpose, research questions, literature review, strategies for data collection, and data analysis techniques with the selected theory. This paper outlines the steps for implementing feminist theory as a theoretical framework in academic research.

In academic scholarship and research, theoretical frameworks are usually necessary. Lester (2005) discussed that articles for journal submissions are sometimes rejected because they do not include a theory or are atheoretical. Therefore, identifying and understanding the steps for integrating a theoretical framework is a recipe for sound research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Feminism**

Feminism explains women speaking, acting, and writing on issues related to women's rights and protection, women identifying social injustice within the status quo, and women exhibiting their unique perspectives on issues related to their social experience (Khan, 2014; Singh, 1997; Tandon, 2008). Singh (1997) asserted that feminism is derived from the Latin word *femina*, which means woman. *Femina*, in other words, means possessing feminine qualities (Singh, 1997). Singh (1997) defined feminism as "a state of being feminine or womanly ... a position favorable to the rights of women" (p. 21). The term feminism and the history of the feminist movement emerged in the late 19th century (Tandon, 2008). Some feminists, however, argued that feminism and the feminist movements began as a systematic ideology and self-conscious in the late 18th century (Singh, 1997; Tandon, 2008). Feminism first appeared in France in the 1880s, then in Great Britain in the 1890s, and eventually in the United States in the early 1900s (Singh, 1997; Tandon, 2008).

In the United States, the term feminist first existed in public parlance in the 1940s (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). An example of the term's use was by Katharine Hepburn, a progressively minded political journalist, in the 1942 motion picture titled *Woman of the Year* (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). However, the term feminist did not gain wide recognition and usage until the 1970s (Jones & Budig, 2007). Feminists, such as Rebecca Walker and Maggie Humm, have argued that the evolution of feminism can be divided into three waves (Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005; Tong, 1998). According to these feminists, these waves throughout history made significant strides toward achieving gender equality, protection, and justice for women in society (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005; Lumen, n.d.).

### **First-Wave Feminism**

The term "first wave of feminism" was coined in retrospect after a newer feminist movement began in the early 1960s that focused on fighting cultural and social inequalities as it did on political inequalities (Harrison & Boyd, 2018; Jones & Budig, 2007; Tong, 1998). The first feminist wave was in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005). This period saw many feminist activities in both the United States and the United Kingdom (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). The first wave started initially to promote the equal property and contract rights in favor of women and oppose the treatment of married women as personal possessions of their husbands (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). However, by the late 19th century, the focus had shifted to gaining political power and fighting for women's right to vote (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). The right of women's suffrage campaign began with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, during which 300 people, both men and women, assembled in Seneca Falls, New York, to rally (Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.).

One of the leading activists of the time, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration, which outlined the feminist movement (Lumen, n.d.; Tong, 1998). Other movement leaders included Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). The focus of activism was achieved; the Representation of the People Act was passed in 1918 to grant women 30 years and above and owned houses the right to vote (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). Later in 1928, the Representation of the People Act was extended to include all women over 21 years (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). The first wave of feminism in America was considered to have officially ended with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1919 (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005). The Amendment granted women in all states the right to vote (Lorber, 2005; Tong, 1998).

The first wave was focused primarily on campaigning for the right of women's suffrage. However, feminist activists, including Margaret Sanger and Voltairine de Cleyre, continued to advocate actively for women's sexual, economic, and reproductive rights (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). An iconic landmark during the first wave was the establishment of female nurses as aides to the military by Florence Nightingale in 1854 (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005). The first wave of feminism was, however, not inclusive and focused mainly on rights for middle or upper-class White women (Gordon, 2019). Sojourner Truth was one of the very few African American women's rights activists of the time (Lumen, n.d.).

### **Second-Wave Feminism**

The second feminist wave was in the 1960s and 1980s (Gordon, 2019). The second wave beginning in the early 1960s describes the actions and ideas of the women's liberation movement, which campaigned for women's social and legal rights (Harrison & Boyd, 2018; Jones & Budig, 2007). The second wave of feminism, in addition to the equal rights amendment, also focused on inclusion issues (Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007).

Thus, the wave became more inclusive of other races and classes, like women of color and women of different economic classes (Lumen, n.d.). The second wave was born out of the Civil Rights Movement and focused on sexuality and reproductive rights issues (Jones & Budig, 2007; Tong, 1998). Second-wave feminism demonstrated the relationship between race, class, and gender oppression issues (Gordon, 2019). The second-wave feminists valued sisterhood and had "women's struggle is class struggle" as their proclamation (Gordon, 2019).

Additionally, the second wave of feminism established a difference between sex and gender (Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.). Second-wave feminists defined sex as biological and gender as a social construct that varies from culture to culture and changes over time (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.). A prominent second-wave feminist was Dorothy Smith, whose work focused on developing a "woman's standpoint" (Chafetz, 1997, p. 100). Other wave feminists included Betty Friedman, Alice Walker, and Andrea Dworkin (Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.; Tong, 1998).

A second-wave feminist, Imelda Whelehan, argued that the second wave of feminism continued the first-wave campaigns, including the suffragettes in the United States and the United Kingdom (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). Specific second-wave feminism campaigns continue to coexist within what is now known as third-wave feminism (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). According to another feminist of the time, Estelle Freedman, first-wave feminism was focused on the right to vote, while second-wave feminism prioritized issues of equality and discrimination (Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005).

Second-wave feminism became synonymous with the slogan "the personal is political," which was coined by the feminist Carol Hanisch (Lorber, 2005; Tong, 1998). The feminists of this wave perceived women's political and cultural inequalities as indistinguishably linked (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005). Thus, the leaders encouraged women to recognize the aspects of their lives that were deeply politicized and, as such, reflected sexist power structures (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). In 1964, the phrase "Women's Liberation" was used for the first time in the United States. However, the phrase did not appear in print until 1966 (Gordon, 2019; Lorber, 2005).

The African American feminist, Gloria Jean Watkins, is considered one of the vocal Women's Liberation Movement critics (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). The feminist, who is also known by the pseudonym "bell hooks," argued that the second wave glossed over class and race and failed to address the issues causing division among women (Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007; Tong, 1998). In her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, bell hooks (1984) emphasized the lack of minority voices in second-wave feminism.

### **Third-Wave Feminism**

The third feminist wave extends from the 1990s to the present day (Gordon, 2019; Harrison & Boyd, 2018). The third wave began to respond to the seeming failures of the second wave and address some of the second-wave criticisms (Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007). Thus, third-wave feminism, in addition to continuing the campaigns of the second wave, also responded to its apparent failures (Jones & Budig, 2007; Lumen, n.d.; Tong, 1998). For instance, the third wave sought to challenge the second wave's essentialist perspective of femininity (Khan, 2014; Tong, 1998). According to the feminists of this period, femininity during the second wave was defined based on the experiences of upper-middle-class White women (Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007; Tong, 1998).

The third-wave feminists argued that women do not need to give up their femininity to be treated equally by society (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). The feminists believed that every woman should define her femininity for herself (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.). Feminists of the third wave focused on diversity and change while exploring concepts such as globalization, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism (Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.; Tong, 1998). The feminists of the third wave tended to focus on micro-politics in addition to challenging the second wave's perspective of what is right or wrong for women (Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005; Tong, 1998). A prominent third-wave feminist is Patricia Hill Collins and her Afrocentric feminist standpoint epistemology (Chafetz, 1997; Khan, 2014; Tong, 1998). Other third-wave feminists include Audre Lourde, whose work focused on the importance of unity among people of different races, genders, sexual orientations, classes, and abilities (Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.). Another prominent figure is Rebecca Walker, who is acknowledged for using "third-wave feminism" for the first time (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.).

### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is a key perspective within sociology that shifts its lens, assumptions, and topical focus toward the experience and viewpoint of women (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Khan, 2014). As such, the theory highlights social trends, problems, and issues that appear natural and reasonable and therefore overlooked or misidentified by a society that is historically based on the dominant male perspective (Crossman, 2018; Tong, 1998). Feminist theorists have created more inclusive and creative social theories that oppose the assumption that ‘man’ should always be the social actor (Gordon, 2019). The theory also considers how systems of power and oppression interact (Crossman, 2018). Thus, the feminist theory focuses not only on gendered power and oppression but also on how gender relations intersect with racism, class system, and sexuality (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019).

Feminist theory manifests in multiple disciplines including sociology, geography, history, and literary criticism (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014). The theory has no single form or meaning due to the rich diversity and interpretation by this variety of disciplines (Chafetz, 1997; Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019). With many interdisciplinary insights and no consensus on the definition of feminist theory, Chafetz (1997) explained the theory using the following four common characteristic criteria:

*Gender comprises a central focus or subject matter of the theory,*

*Gender relations are viewed as a problem—feminist theory seeks to understand how gender is related to social inequities, strains, and contradictions,*

*Gender relations are not viewed as immutable,*

*Feminist theory can be used to challenge, counteract, or change a status quo that disadvantages or devalues women. (p. 98)*

With these boundaries in mind, feminist theory is defined as a critique of mainstream sociology that explores “the relationship between gender and various social, cultural, economic, psychological, and political structures and processes” (Chafetz, 1997, pp. 97–98). Thus, feminist theory explores the inequality in gender relations as well as the constitution of gender (Chafetz, 1997; Khan, 2014; Lumen, n.d.).

### **Feminist Theory Constructs**

Three primary constructs can be identified in feminist theory, namely, class, gender, and race (Chafetz, 1997; Tong, 1998). Class refers to oppression in the social structure based on social and economic inequality (Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007). Race refers to the social grouping of individuals based on shared qualities that society defines as distinct or unique (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). Gender refers to the social characteristics that define an individual as either feminine or masculine (Crossman, 2018; Jones & Budig, 2007; Tong, 1998).

Gender has several subconstructs, namely, gender inequality, gender oppression, gender roles, gender objectification, and gender division of labor (Chafetz, 1997; Jones & Budig, 2007; Lorber, 2005). Gender inequality explains how women’s experiences and location in social situations differ not only from that of men but also unequal (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). Gender oppression describes how women are oppressed, subordinated, and sometimes abused by men (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019). Gender roles refer to the different roles that society assigns to men and women based on the values associated with womanhood and femininity, manhood and masculinity (Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998). Gender objectification describes the treatment an individual receives based on their sexual attributes (Crossman, 2018; Tong, 1998). Gender division of labor refers to the manner in which work is divided between men and women based on their gender roles (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Tong, 1998).

### **Feminist Theory Application in the Literature**

Many contemporary scholars have argued for the significance of feminist theory in the social and political discourse of gender relations and the constitution of gender in mainstream society (Begum & Sarmin, 2016; McCormick & Bunting, 2002; Rosser, 1998; Sharma, 2019; The Symposium Team, 2000). Sharma (2019) conducted a study on applying feminist theory to medical education. According to the researcher, medical education needs to be reviewed in order to properly address gender-related issues like wage gaps, sexual harassment, and leadership inequalities. Sharma (2019) argued that feminist theory could help with these dynamics in both the classroom and the field. The researcher concluded that feminist theory possesses the potential to move medical professionals and educators from theory to practice while building bridges of solidarity between the medical profession and the community to whom they render service (Sharma, 2019).

A study by Begum and Sarmin (2016) used feminist theory to empower women by protecting their rights and interests. The researchers argued that by empowering women, several other people benefit including families, intimate partners, and the communities in which these women live (Begum & Sarmin, 2016). Empowering women means emphasizing their participation in all aspects of life, whether social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, or legal (Begum & Sarmin, 2016). The researchers examined ready-made garment companies

and how the garment industry impacted women's empowerment in Bangladesh (Begum & Sarmin, 2016). Data analysis indicated that the garment industry had a strong positive impact on the empowerment of women. The researchers identified that working in garment companies has elevated the social status of women (Begum & Sarmin, 2016).

Additionally, the women workers in the garment companies were not only capable of performing their duties, but their performance was at par with that of their male coworkers (Begum & Sarmin, 2016). Thus, the researchers concluded that there was a strong presence of feminism in the garment industry of Bangladesh (Begum & Sarmin, 2016). By participating in the social experiences and acting on their social interests, the female workers in the garment industry have achieved benefits in the form of affordable childcare, affordable healthcare, voting right, reduced sexual harassment, equal pay for equal work, education, and reduced domestic violence (Begum & Sarmin, 2016).

Another research by McCormick and Bunting (2002) applied feminist theory to the study of women and cardiovascular diseases. According to the researchers, the recovery of women from heart-related diseases and how they live with these diseases is different from that of men (McCormick & Bunting, 2002). McCormick and Bunting (2002) saw the need to deliberate on women in a way for their differences to emerge without hindrance. Thus, by using a feminist theoretical perspective, the researchers were able to avoid any confrontation with the inferiority of women to men (McCormick & Bunting, 2002). McCormick and Bunting (2002) concluded that cardiovascular research from a feminist perspective would advance the recognition and knowledge about women's health.

The Symposium Team (2000) conducted a study and applied feminist theory to changing organizational climate and culture. The team, made up of seven female researchers, argued from the standpoint that for years, feminist researchers had used diverse feminist perspectives to conduct research (The Symposium Team, 2000). However, not much has been achieved in terms of making contributions to the understanding and change of organizations (The Symposium Team, 2000). This empirical study had the research site in an organization where the researchers, while holding on to their stands on gender, encountered many challenges with the organization's climate and culture (The Symposium Team, 2000). This study served as a response to some of the critiques of feminist research by generating visions and strategies that will make organizational changes to incorporate gender consciousness a reality (The Symposium Team, 2000).

A study conducted by Rosser (1998) used feminist theory to examine women in science intervention programs and identified a gap between these programs and the theory. The researcher argued that the reason for the gap was the lack of scientists in women's studies programs (Rosser, 1998). The federal government and other foundations are funding the development of enhanced programs for women in science (Rosser, 1998). However, the scientists in charge of designing the intervention programs are purely science-oriented and thus possess sufficient knowledge about neither gender studies nor feminist theory (Rosser, 1998). Thus, limited programs end up serving the purpose of eliminating barriers women face and ending gender-based discrimination so that women can enjoy the science field on the same level as men (Rosser, 1998). Rosser (1998) concluded that for the success of the intervention programs, feminist theory should be applied to how women in science programs are designed and developed.

### **Feminist Theory Criticisms**

Many scholars have criticized the insights of feminist perspectives (Lay & Daley, 2007; Pearson, 2007; Skelton & Francis, 2005; Szymanski, 2006). Skelton and Francis (2005) and Szymanski (2006) argued that oppression is not always gender-specific because it can occur in supervisory positions regardless of gender. Also, several women do not identify as feminists, although they advocate for feminist principles (Szymanski, 2006). The scholars cited an example of certain women of color who do not embrace feminist ideals as essential and yet focus on addressing issues related to power and dominance struggles (Pearson, 2007; Skelton & Francis, 2005; Szymanski, 2006).

Some scholars, including Lay and Daley (2007), criticized the dearth of research that focuses on the refinement of feminist theory. According to the researchers, the theory is not applied to expanding theory development (Lay & Daley, 2007). Feminist theory primarily serves as a lens for other issues, such as advocacy and philosophical views, which overshadow the refinement and development of the theory (Lay & Daley, 2007).

## **3. Discussions and Conclusions**

### **Feminist Theory Application to a Contemporary Research Topic**

As indicated in the Literature Review section of this paper, feminist theory can serve as a theoretical lens to explore research studies related to several women's issues. The discussions below focus on how the gender constructs of the feminist theory (gender inequality, gender oppression, gender roles, gender objectification, and

gender division of labor) can be used to explore the experiences of women leaders in the contemporary organizational setting.

### **Problem Statement**

Women's experiences and location or position in social situations differ from those of men (Crossman, 2018; Wollstonecraft, 1997). Society assigns different roles to men and women based on the values associated with womanhood and femininity, manhood and masculinity (Gordon, 2019). These gender divisions of labor become naturalized and begin to appear reasonable because of the societal values and beliefs that are historically based on the dominant male perspective (Crossman, 2018). Thus, women have no choice but to live in a society that is governed by patriarchal standards (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Crossman, 2018).

The experiences of women and their location in social situations are different and unequal to that of men (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019). This reality of women comes with socially acceptable expectations of how women need to live and behave. Women from infancy are socialized differently and are told repetitively that they are inferior and therefore have no place in a 'man's world' (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Crossman, 2018). Thus, to be accepted by society, women are expected to make modifications to their lives in order to meet these patriarchal ideals (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Wollstonecraft, 1997).

Research has indicated that women's capacity for agency and moral reasoning is the same as men's (Crossman, 2018). However, patriarchy and its sexist division of labor continue to deny women the opportunity to practice and express agency and reasoning (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Crossman, 2018). In addition to different and unequal social experiences from that of men, women are also oppressed, subordinated, and sometimes abused by men (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019). Thus, social dynamics relegate women to the private domain of the household, dismissed from participating fully in social situations (Crossman, 2018; Wollstonecraft, 1997).

It is therefore considered an enormous achievement when women break through the mold of patriarchy and sexism and become leaders despite being told repetitively that they have no place in a 'man's world' (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Wollstonecraft, 1997). Very few women have been able to break these traditional barriers to occupy prominent leadership positions in society (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Crossman, 2018). Exploring the experiences of women who have been able to break these barriers is worth studying. These women leaders have a story to tell and their social experiences will shed light and inform discourses and decisions on gender equality and justice. By exploring and acknowledging the lived experiences of these women, this study will provide answers to questions such as what it means to be a woman leader.

### **Application of the Feminist Theory**

The gender constructs of the feminist theory (gender inequality, gender oppression, gender roles, gender objectification, and gender division of labor) can be used to develop the study's research questions. A typical research question can be framed as "How do women leaders experience gender inequality?" or "What are women leaders' experiences with gender inequality?" depending on the chosen research methodology and approach.

### **Justification for Using Feminist Theory to Explore This Topic**

The constructs of feminist theory can be used to explore the lived experiences of women in leadership positions. The feminist theory advocates that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). However, for ages, women have been oppressed in a dominant patriarchal culture (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Gordon, 2019). Society's cultural beliefs naturalize gender divisions so much that they are no longer recognizable. Thus, the cultural beliefs perverse so much into social experiences that when men and women are objectively performing the same way in the workforce, the performance of women is still seen as lower compared to that of men (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). There should, therefore, be advocacy for women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes (Ajayi-Hackworth, 2017; Crossman, 2018; Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005).

## **4. Summary**

The feminist movements gave birth to the feminist theory (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Khan, 2014). Thus, feminist theory can be considered feminism extending into philosophical or theoretical fields (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Khan, 2014). Feminist theory incorporates perspectives from a variety of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, women's studies, economics, philosophy, art history, and literary criticism (Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). The feminist perspective, no matter the discipline, focuses on problematic issues of women including women's oppression in a patriarchal society, women's marginalization due to sexual politics, sexual colonialism, women's identity loss, women's freedom, and the suppression of women's voice or opinion (Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005).

The sociological perspective of feminist theory, for instance, views society in a manner that illuminates the social forces, problems, and relations that create and support injustice, inequality, and oppression, and thereby promotes the pursuit of equality and justice (Crossman, 2018; Gordon, 2019; Jones & Budig, 2007; Khan, 2014; Lorber, 2005). Although the theory is famous for its gender-related insights across several disciplines (Begum & Sarmin, 2016; McCormick & Bunting, 2002; Rosser, 1998; Sharma, 2019; The Symposium Team, 2000), some scholars have criticized the dearth of research focused on the refinement of feminist theory (Lay & Daley, 2007; Pearson, 2007). Feminist theory is an appropriate theoretical lens for exploring the experiences of women leaders because the theory advocates for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women.

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