

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Historically, women have always been oppressed by the system of patriarchy. Since the colonialism period until the present, women have not been equal to men. In the early societies of America, women's legal situation was handed to their husbands' hands. Their possessions and properties belonged to the men in the family (i.e. husband or father) and marriage was a wedlock, locking them from freedom as women were treated as properties (Zinn, 2005, pp. 99-101). Marriage as a social institution oppressed women by stripping their rights and making them dependent. This oppression continues, yet women do not stay in silence. Women's struggle for freedom and equality has occurred since a long time ago, including Anne Hutchinson's rebellion against churches for women's rights to interpret the bible by themselves (Zinn, 2005, pp. 102) and Mary Wollstonecraft through her writing entitled *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, but the major struggles of women occurred in the 1800s when the first wave of feminist happened.

In the nineteenth century in the antebellum America, women, regardless what racial groups they belonged to, had restricted rights about what to do and what to get by the society which was based upon the system of patriarchy. Women in the nineteenth century were "bound together by common oppression that freezes and levels their enormously diverse experience" (Carroll, 1976, p. 86).