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# The Help

Morgan Ashley Craft '12

*Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy*

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Morgan Ashley Craft

Class of 2012

Dr. Gleason: Gender Studies

## The Help

Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* focuses on the racism that was prominent in 1962 Jackson, Mississippi. Two black maids, Aibileen and Minny, and a white socialite, Skeeter, join together, in secret and risking their lives, to write a book that tells the stories of black domestic maids working in white Southern households. Specifically, Skeeter focuses on beginning a career as a journalist, instead of finding a husband and starting a family, which was not a norm amongst the Southern women. *The Help* not only addresses racism in the 1960s, it also focuses on the importance of a husband and a family to most of the Southern women. Kathryn Stockett uses Skeeter Phelan to break the norm of a husband and family being the top priority of women, an issue also addressed in *The Feminine Mystique* by Friedan. This allows readers to see how women's priorities have evolved since the 1960s.

Similar to *The Feminine Mystique* by Friedan, *The Help* portrays the importance of a husband and a family to women in the 1960s through the character, Skeeter Phelan. Skeeter decided to make an education and a career her top priorities instead of a husband and children. Skeeter received pressure everyday from her mother and friends to get married. The women of Jackson strongly believed that it was "all about putting yourself in a man-meeting situation where you can" (Stockett 66). Similar to the women discussed in *The Feminine Mystique*, many women in *The Help* went to college in search of a husband. However, Skeeter broke this norm by having the ultimate goal of preparing herself for a career in journalism. Her mother was

disappointed that Skeeter did not find a husband and was not content with her daughter receiving a degree:

“Four years my daughter goes off to college and what does she come home with?” she asks.

“A diploma?”

“A pretty piece of paper,” Mother says.

“I told you. I didn’t meet anybody I wanted to marry,’ I say” (64- 65).

Not only did she receive this treatment from her mother, she had to endure it from her two best friends. Both of her friends dropped out of college, married and began having children. They often pitied Skeeter and frowned upon her for being a single 23 years old. According to Friedan, by the mid-1950s, the average age of married women was dropping into the teens. Also, 60% of women dropped out of college in fear that too much education would prevent them from finding a husband. However, Skeeter broke this gender norm by continuing her education and not seeking a husband, but waiting for the right one to come along.

Through *The Help*, readers are able to see the shift in women’s goals over the decades. The novel shows that most women in the 1960s did not view education as important as getting married and starting a family. However, in today’s society, increasingly more women are receiving an education and having careers. Unlike the women of *The Help*, most women in today’s society are not pressured to get married at an early age. Also, they are not as pressured to choose between having a family or a career.

Similar to *The Feminine Mystique* by Friedan, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett addresses the pressure of the women in the 1960s to get married and start a family at a young age. Although she received criticism from her mother and friends, character Skeeter Phelan broke this norm by finishing college and beginning her career as a journalist. This causes readers to see how women have become more focused on an education and career than beginning a family.

Stockett, Kathryn. *The Help*. New York: Berkley Books, 2009. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963. Print.