

Oral History Project

Your argument, that perhaps Douglas's work oversimplifies women's experiences during this period, is incisive, yet there is always room for improvement. First, although your interview material is very rich, you tend to substitute lengthy quotes for your own analysis. The title, "What Mama Really Said," suggests that you will focus on your interviewees' relationships with their mothers; similarly, it implies that you will use your interviews to challenge Douglas's descriptions of "typical" mother-daughter relationships of the period and the ways these relationships affected her peers' "readings" of the mass media and their relationships to the second-wave feminist movement. I think that you have enough material to focus on this aspect of your interviews without needing to include the last long paragraph on popular music, the Shirelles, and your interviewees' musical role models (which seems a little like an afterthought). Perhaps tighten the thesis to reflect a focus on mother-daughter relationships. Overall, include shorter quotes from your interviews and more of your analysis; also, if a quote exceeds two sentences, you should indent and single-space it.

If you would like to revise your project, please make an appointment with me via email within the next week to discuss possible revisions.

What Mama Really Said: Questioning Douglas' Female Stereotypes

In Where the Girls Are, author Susan Douglas opines "My generation grew up internalizing an endless film loop of fairy-tale princesses, beach bunnies, withes, flying nuns, bionic women, and beauty queens, a series of flickering images that urged us, since childhood, to be all of these things all the time. [We grew up in different places, with different parents, and with wildly varying class and ethnic backgrounds. There is much women my age don't have in common.] Yet we do have a shared history of listening to the Chiffons, watching *Bewitched*, wearing miniskirts, idolizing Diana Ross, singing 'I Am Woman', watching *Charlie's Angels*, being converted by Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer, and Betty Freidan, hooting over *Dallas* and *Dynasty* (but not missing a single week) and, as a result, becoming women with a profound love-hate relationship with the mass media, and with the cultural values the mass media convey."¹

~~pg. 18~~ Though this statement may reflect the experiences of many women of the baby boomer generation, Douglas' claim that her book represents any sort of female experiential universality is misguided. With even a brief examination of two baby boomers' accounts of their exposure to pop culture, their role models, and their values, there is clearly significant variation in the sorts of relationships women have had with the mass media.

Thesis

Also

A critique of
Second wave feminism
& its notion of a
unive
womanhood
put forth by
feminists of
color
which Douglas attempts

¹ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 18.

indent +
single -
space -
long quotes

The most evident of these variations concerns female's relationships with their mothers. At one point Douglas says "I especially wanted to avoid ending up like Mom."² No wonder! As Douglas states in the chapter Mama Said, "To cope with the misogyny of American culture, many of our mothers smoked, or drank, or took Miltowns, or saw a shrink, or yelled at us a lot."² (pg 55). The two women interviewed had very different concepts^{of} their mothers than does Douglas. According to Nora, "In the fifties, my role models were my mother, my grandmother and my aunt. There was a wide range, there, of the possibilities. My grandmother was quite reserved, very private, incredibly well-dressed, quiet beautiful but quite distant. My mother was very beautiful, very attractive, particularly to men. She was very happy in her body, very content to be a woman even though she felt demeaned because she was very smart and didn't feel like her intelligence was taken into account because of her beauty. Her beauty trumped her intelligence. My aunt, on the other hand, was a lot less attractive than her sister, but did much better a school. She represented the ability to make your way with your mind. My mother represented the ability to make your way with your beauty. These were both equal role models to me."³ Betty also thought of her mother as a very positive role model, "My mother was and is probably the strongest female role model in my life, ever, because I always knew how smart she was, how competent she was. She embodies everything I wanted to be that I knew really was something to value so in a way she was a buffer. She wasn't like any of these things I was in awe of, but she buffered me from wanting it so badly that I wanted it too badly. By example she, every day in every way, she probably kept me grounded with the values I wanted to have, and I think I have."⁴

² Douglas, 55.
³ Nora Logan interview by
⁴ Betty Stone interview by

June 26, 2008, transcript, p. 3.
June 28, 2008, transcript, p. 1.

Perhaps this is because neither woman interviewed described their mother's past as the middle-class "ideological roller-coaster ride"⁵ Douglas describes. Betty said, "My mom, I think, is an aberrant example because her mother was a very strong person. When my grandmother was 35 or 34, my grandfather committed suicide. They had a very, very successful men's and women's clothing store. My grandmother took over the store. He died, she never remarried, and she took over the business. There were four kids, and they were very well to do. As my mother grew up, her mother was a business woman. It's very antithetical to the stereotype of the time. She was quite a pillar of the Jewish community in the small town in which they lived. So that was my grandmother as a role model to my mother. She was a bigwig in the community and so forth. They had maids so my grandmother wasn't cleaning house nor was my mother. My grandmother never remarried, though she could have remarried. Then my mother went to college, University of Michigan, where she was an economics major. Her first job out of college was that she was employed as a researcher on a US government-funded research project. Her job was to interview women during the war who had jobs, who previously didn't have jobs but, you know, a lot of women took domestic jobs because men went to fight, what they were doing a research study about how many of those women who were now in the workplace intended to or wanted to continue working when the war was over. She also had a job working on the first computer, the ENIAC. And then she married my dad. So hers was kind of an atypical trajectory. Then she had four kids. My dad worked. Then my brother, the youngest, was finally in first grade, my mother went back to school and got her teaching credential. She worked for 20 some years as a teacher."⁶ Nora's family background was also not the middle-class sort described by Douglas. "I grew in an urban and suburban environment, to families that had

⁵ Douglas, 45.

⁶ Betty, 1.

money. And women didn't have to work in order to make money. At the time when my values were formed, women were taken care of, and they were taken care of so that they could in turn take care of men and children. A college education wasn't necessary for that. What you really needed to learn was how to cook and how to clean and how to hold a conversation."⁷

Another way in which Douglas is off the mark is in her insistence that the Shirelles mattered so much that baby boomer women clung "to the lyrics like a life raft."⁸ In fact, Douglas devotes an entire chapter to the Shirelles. When asked about musical preferences, neither women interviewed listed the Shirelles as artists of influence to them. Nora really liked some other female Motown artists however. "I liked Gladys Knight and the Pips. I adored Aretha Franklin. These were ballsy amused competent women who had a real skill. The whole idea of having a trade or a skill was something that women were beginning to hold onto to, and that was new for women of a certain class."⁹ She also mentioned Janis Joplin as a big influence. "I loved Janis Joplin. Her style appealed to me. I thought that she was just great. The point of someone like Janis Joplin was that, as true to herself as she was, I wanted to be as true to myself as I was. The whole idea of imitation was the antithesis of the movement of the 60s and 70s. But what she did do was let me realize that I could play as well. And it was really all about play. Playing on your own terms in your own sandbox and not playing with the costumes that had been handed to you by culture."¹⁰ Betty was really fond of Joan Baez. "She was like the liberal Seventeen Magazine model. She was gorgeous. She was cool. She was a fabulous singer and songwriter. She had all the charisma and politically correct. She was up a notch from Seventeen Magazine. She was the liberal glamour girl. To me that was someone to admire enormously. Oh God! Joan

How does Douglas's writing style exaggerate sarcasm affect her argument on her ability to be taken seriously?

Even if they didn't listen to the Shirelles how did they pave the way for later Motown artists like Franklin or for artists like Joplin to sing about sex?

⁷ Nora, 1.
⁸ Douglas, 83.
⁹ Nora, 3.
¹⁰ Nora, 5.

Baez. I saw her in the Berkeley Amphitheatre. I just admired Joan Baez so much. For all that she did. It wasn't just that she was a singer, she was an activist. She was very smart. She had it all. She was beautiful. She was smart. She was principled. She was an activist. She was not a role model because I didn't think about being just like her. I could never be just like her. She was an inspiration. She still is."¹¹

These are but a couple of examples of discrepancies between Susan Douglas' concept of mass media's vast influence on American women and the experiences of two women interviewed about this topic. Perhaps Douglas is as guilty of perpetuating stereotypes as the mass media that she lambasts, but with which she seems inexorably tied.

Need fewer long quotes and more of your analysis

¹¹ Betty, 3

Nora Logan interview, June 26, 2008

Question # 1 Mass media influence

It prevails not just for women but for men as well, and for our culture in general.

Our mass media has turned us into consumers and clients rather than individuals in control of their lives.

I think it is a stance that many women had adopted already, at least in the last say 60 or 70 years, and I the image of having to be beautiful, having to be pleasant, having to be in charge but not in control, having to asking for advice, having to be receptive, has strongly influenced my idea of what it means to be a woman.

Amorphous. I guess I Remember it from my mother, who loved being a woman, and from my grandmother who also loved being a woman. And neither one of them, even though they had lot of power in the family, neither one of them really bucked their husbands.

I remember my mother basically telling me it was more fun being a woman and that women should be taken care of by men.

She said to me Now I don't have to work any more. I said but don't you want to? No, now that I'm married my job is taking care of you and my husband. That was a huge piece of information when I was 6 and a half years old.

I think she got it directly from her mother and from the general zeitgeist. A woman's job was to take care of the husband and the family. And the woman's job wasn't an easy job, but it was completely dependent on having a husband and a family

Women among themselves knew that they were intelligent.

I grew in an urban and suburban environment, to families that had money. And women didn't have to work tin order to make money. At the time when my values were formed, women were taken care of, and they were taken care of so that they could in turn take care of men and children. A college education wasn't necessary for that. What you really needed to learn was how to cook and how to clean and how to hold a conversation.

(second wave feminism) I actually think it developed in a large extent because of media. I think that television projected something like Leave it to Beaver, which I watched as a kid. But as a kid I would cringe with embarrassment, because I was also getting other influences. So these things were kind of like perfect icons, but they were also held up to examination in a way that I think they hadn't been before. I think that the media probably aided in it.

either be one or the other, and the Beatles mixed it up. They were intelligent, they were witty, they were sexy, and they were romantic. It was all mental.

I liked Gladys Knight and the Pips. I adored Aretha Franklin. These were ballsy amused competent women who had a real skill. The whole idea of having a trade or a skill was something that women were beginning to hold onto to, and that was new for women of a certain class.

Role models.

In the fifties, my role models were my mother, my grandmother and my aunt. There was a wide range, there, of the possibilities. My grandmother was quite reserved, very private, incredibly well-dressed, quiet beautiful but quite distant. My mother was very beautiful, very attractive, particularly to men. She was very happy in her body, very content to be a woman even though she felt demeaned because she was very smart and didn't feel like her intelligence was taken into account because of her beauty. Her beauty trumped her intelligence. My aunt, on the other hand, was a lot less attractive than her sister, but did much better a school. She represented the ability to make your way with your mind. My mother represented the ability to make your way with your beauty. These were both equal role models to me.

Magazines/TV shows

I didn't read magazines as a young child. Magazines were for adults. I read the funny papers. I read classic children's books, so the role models would have been from a couple of generations earlier. I read Little Women. I read hundreds of fairy tales. That's what girls read. That's what I loved.

Disney movies

I remember seeing Snow White. I'll bet I was under ten when I first saw it in the movie theatre. I thought it was incredibly empowering. Because there was a girl who was beautiful, which was a good. She had a very difficult life, which girls and women were kind of subliminally taught to expect. You're going to have to wait on others and take care of others. And she does in that movie. Then she gets her comeuppance, but her comeuppance is that she wins the prince. Which was the goal of all of the women in the first place. So it was not a very a very radical movie in any way. The payoff was the prince, and that was the payoff until the early seventies, when women, 15-20 years older than I was, began to publish books questioning that premise.

Feminism

Because they were able to do that, I was able to go whoa! But the interesting thing was that those books influenced not just me but the boys I knew, so that everybody had to deal with the fact that maybe the payoff wasn't the prince. And boys and girls had to deal with that. And that's when, oddly enough, homosexuality began to become much

more acceptable. Both men and women had to reinvent themselves in the face of the questions the feminists raised. The emotional shifts went along with along with the Vietnam war.

The Vietnam war led us to question received truth. It never occurred to us that a government could lie to us. Our parents didn't think a government could lie to them. The government and one's parents became conjoined, because it was a generational thing that it's alright to lie. And we, 17-28, said no, it's not alright to lie because our lives are at stake. If you're going to question the government, which is in loco parentis for everyone in the country, then you're going to question all of the received information that you had gotten up to that point. And that's what we started doing. And we were helped by Betty Friedan and we were helped by Alix Schulman and we were helped by Bella Abzug.

The grandmothers are holding it together now. God bless them. They're holding a lot of working class families together.

I think a lot of people get their real role models from the church. Or they get their real role models from friends and neighbors. Or they get their real role model from some aunt that they admired. I think the mass media is more of a follower than a generator. I think people get their real cues from other human beings. I think that the mass media, for everybody, you kind of watch it with a snicker. All of it.

I loved Janis Joplin. Her style appealed to me. I thought that she was just great. The point of someone like Janis Joplin was that, as true to herself as she was, I wanted to be as true to myself as I was. The whole idea of imitation was the antithesis of the movement of the 60s and 70s. But what she did do was let me realize that I could play as well. And it was really all about play. Playing on your own terms in your own sandbox and not playing with the costumes that had been handed to you by culture.

Betty Stone interview, June 28, 2008

Mom:

My mother was and is probably the strongest female role model in my life, ever, because I always knew how smart she was, how competent she was. She embodies everything I wanted to be that I knew really was something to value so in a way she was a buffer. She wasn't like any of these things I was in awe of, but she buffered me from wanting it so badly that I wanted it too badly. By example she, every day in every way, she probably kept me grounded with the values I wanted to have, and I think I have.

But the bad thing is, she's 87 (my sisters and I all complain about this to each other), and that to this day, for all of these years, when you watch TV with her, or you meet somebody with her, she comments on the woman's appearance, because she's very self-deprecating. If we're watching the news together, and it's a (too) lovely female anchor and she'll say (it drives me crazy) "Isn't she beautiful Betty? Wouldn't you love to be that thin?" She's always said these negative things about herself. So that's a very negative message. So although she's a phenomenally strong role model, I'm also getting this message that's reinforcing what I'm telling you about how enthralled I am about people who've physically got it together.

Ideological roller coaster ride:

My mom, I think, is an aberrant example because her mother was a very strong person. When my grandmother was 35 or 34, my grandfather committed suicide. They had a very, very successful men's and women's clothing store. My grandmother took over the store. So he died, she never remarried, he died and she took over the business. There were four kids, and they were very well to do. As my mother grew up, her mother was a business woman. It's very antithetical to the stereotype of the time. She was quite a pillar of the Jewish community in the small town in which they lived. So that was my grandmother as a role model to my mother. She was a bigwig in the community and so forth. They had maids so my grandmother wasn't cleaning house nor was my mother. My grandmother never remarried, though she could have remarried.

Then my mother went to college, University of Michigan, where she was an economics major. Her first job out of college was that she was employed as a researcher on a US government-funded research project. Her job was to interview women during the war who had jobs, who previously didn't have jobs, but you know a lot of women took domestic jobs because men went to fight, what they were doing a research study about how many of those women who were now in the workplace intended to or wanted to continue working when the war was over. She also had a job working on the first computer, the Eniak. And then she married my dad. So hers was kind of an atypical trajectory. Then she had four kids and then my dad worked and then when my brother, the youngest, was finally in first grade, she went back to school and got her teaching credential and then she worked for 20 some years as a teacher.

Do you consider yourself a feminist?

Yeah, I guess. What the alternative? I don't know any more what people mean by that. I've heard the word used more in a negative context in the last maybe ten years, and I feel really badly about that because I thought we were at a place that everyone was a feminist and you didn't need to use the word anymore. That it's gone out of parlance because it's such a given. I don't want to call myself that, although I guess that is what I am, because I'd like to think that you don't have to be called that, we just are now. That it's the status quo. In my opinion, everything feminism stands for really is human rights. So I would rather not pigeonhole it as feminism but human rights, because it's a bigger issue.

I don't think much has changed with regard to women. Woman's rights yeah, but cultural expectations of women, no.

Mass media –

This is one of my big issues, I'm sure it is for a lot of women, it's just really disappointing to me that in 2008, I don't think anything has really changed about the emphasis placed in, from my perspective, everywhere in every way by everyone that the goal for a woman is to be attractive. That's what people expect. Women expect it, men expect it, everyone expects it. It's still painful to me because I don't fit that at all. It was really painful as a kid because I grew up in the beach culture. Southern California, the music of the time was the Beach Boys. After school you could see surf boards on top of the cars people had driven to school and my sense of it was well, I'm not that, I'm not that.. And when I went to the beach I felt so out of it, Maybe everybody did, I don't know, because of those little bikinis and the muscle men. I just felt so out of it. It's in all advertising. What product isn't sold with a gorgeous body? It seems like not a lot has changed. In the funny way, it's a tie that binds women.

I remember we had a television when I was six or seven, so that was 1957, and I remember really well those shows. And even though there were far, far fewer shows on then and they weren't in color and so forth and so on, I remember vividly at the time, being really sad or disappointed that my mother didn't wear shirtdresses and high heels like June Cleaver. I still remember it vividly. I love my mother dearly, she's a really accomplished woman. But our house does not match up. It was that the mother was in high heels. I always sort of knew, well that's stupid. I was sort of torn. I realized that it was inappropriate and stupid but nevertheless there was the model. And then the commercials that went with that. Fed into that. Lots of women in shirtdresses and high heels, vacuuming or dabbing the window with a little white cloth. Actually it still bothers me. It doesn't still bother me my mother doesn't wear heels, it bothers me that that was ever there, it bothers me that it got to me, it bothers me that it's still on my mind.

I had a love/hate relationship with Seventeen Magazine. I had a subscription in high school. It represented everything that I wasn't, everything that I would love to be. So I was like voyeur or sort of gawking, gawking at these people and these celebrities and these perfect girls, smiling, long leggy. So I had this love/hate relationship with

Seventeen. I couldn't wait to look at it, but it was everything I wasn't, so it was this longing, this incredible longing to be that way.

Jackie Kennedy – We were kind of told she was a role model. She's still talked about in those terms. Such grace. She was elegant and young and had these darling children. She was very classy, she redid the White House. She spoke French and was very thin. And was very beautiful.

1950s. My mom was a role model. I don't remember thinking consciously I want to be just like my mother. I remember respecting her enormously. And kind of in awe of all she did and accomplished.

Feminists

Gloria Steinem was I think revered by a lot of people. She sort of had it both ways. She fulfilled this expectation that women are thin and gorgeous, and she also had this phenomenal intellect and assertive leadership to take the women's movement. But I remember Bella Abzug and Betty Freidan, who interestingly were the opposite in terms of fulfilling the physical role, but the degree to which they were the opposite of that, sort of, made a statement. I remember being really impressed by them.

Vietnam war –

At Berkeley, I don't remember watching TV once. The news was before you. I remember in the dorm at dinner and the entire cafeteria was silent because they had piped in the radio when they were naming the draft numbers – who had the high ones and who had the low ones. It was really chilling.

First it was civil rights and women's rights, that was in the sixties, and by the time I got to college it was the antiwar movement The free speech movement started in Berkeley in 1964. There really was a perception of it all being change. It was all good. It was all important. There was a real sense that all of this was part and parcel of important liberal change. It wasn't like you cared about the war but didn't really care about civil rights or the women's movement. Anyone who cared about one cared about the others. It was seen as a break from paternalistic white oppression. Those were very exciting times. It was so obvious that it was an important time. Like living history.

Joan Baez – (couldn't relate to her) She was like the liberal Seventeen Magazine model. She was gorgeous. She was cool. She was a fabulous singer and songwriter. She had all the charisma and politically correct. She was up a notch from Seventeen Magazine. She was the liberal glamour girl. To me that was someone to admire enormously. Oh God! Joan Baez. I saw her in the Berkeley Amphitheatre. I just admired Joan Baez so much. For all that she did. It wasn't just that she was a singer, she was an activist. She was very smart. She had it all. She was beautiful. She was smart. She was principled. She was an activist. She was not a role model because I didn't think about being just like her. I could never be just like her. She was an inspiration. She still is.

"Mini Oral History" Project Grading Criteria

The project is worth 150 points and 15% of your final AMS 110 grade. Papers will be evaluated in five areas or categories, each worth 30 points. These categories are:

Category	Evaluation	Score
Content	<p>Original and clear thesis with consistent, sufficient, persuasive, unified, and well-organized support and illustration. Ideas and points are original, significant, and well-developed (30 - 27)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clearly stated thesis, but the paper inadequately sustains the argument; thesis is unclear, but the paper sustains an argument (26 - 24)</p> <p>Poorly stated thesis, inadequately supports argument, poor organization (23- 18)</p> <p>No thesis or argument (17 - 0)</p>	24
Where the Girls Are	<p>Convincing analysis of interviewee responses using Susan Douglas's <i>Where the Girls Are</i>. Incorporates and analyzes at least two quotes from Douglas. Clear connections between points and supporting quotes (30 - 27)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Analysis of interviewee responses using Susan Douglas's <i>Where the Girls Are</i>, incorporates at least two quotes from Douglas but the connections between the points and supporting quotes are unclear (26 - 24)</p> <p>Analysis of interviewee responses using Susan Douglas's <i>Where the Girls Are</i>, without incorporating and analyzing quotes from Douglas (23 - 18)</p> <p>Paper does not use Douglas's <i>Where the Girls Are</i> to analyze interviewee responses (17 - 0)</p>	24
Writing Style and Mechanics	<p>The paper has a tone and perspective appropriate to academic writing. The paper meets academic standards in punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and overall appearance. The paper is typed in 12 pt., Times New Roman font, with 1" margins (30 - 27)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks one of these conventions (26 - 24)</p> <p>The paper lacks two of these conventions (23 - 18)</p> <p>The paper is incomprehensible due to errors in language or usage (17 - 0)</p>	25
Interview and Transcript	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The writer formulated 4-5 open-ended, thoughtful questions to ask her/his interviewee; provides a transcript of the interview; and incorporates at least two quotes from the interviewee (30 - 27)</p> <p>The paper lacks one of these requirements (26 - 24)</p> <p>The paper lacks two of these requirements (23 - 18)</p> <p>The writer does not provide the transcript of the interview (17 - 0)</p>	30
Citation Format	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The paper correctly and consistently uses footnotes and the Chicago Manual of Style format when citing (30 - 27)</p> <p>The paper attempts to use footnotes and the Chicago Manual of Style format when citing but does so incorrectly (26 - 24)</p> <p>The paper uses a citation style used in another discipline, such as APA or MLA (23 - 18)</p> <p>Citation is unclear or missing; remember that lack of citation is plagiarism and may be grounds for failing the project or, in certain cases, the course (17 - 0)</p> <p><u>*See "Citation Formar" tab on Blackboard for more information on how to cite correctly using footnotes and the Chicago Manual of Style</u></p>	30

133/150

89%