

Revised Oral History Project
July 14, 2008

What Mama Really ^{said?} Questioning Douglas' Concept of Mother/Daughter Relationships
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In chapter two of *Where the Girls Are*, author Susan Douglas attempts to forge a common-ground of experience among baby boomer females. One of these common experiences is, supposedly, a wholesale rejection of the mores and values of the previous generation in favor of modern mass media representations of femininity. According to Douglas, the mass media had such a foothold on the young female psyche that mothers not only lacked influence, they became the antithesis of what young women strove to become. At one point Douglas says "I especially wanted to avoid ending up like Mom."¹ 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 However, though Douglas asserts that the influence of baby boomers' mothers was trumped by the influences of the mass media, the two women interviewed expressed the opposite viewpoint about the relative influences of their mothers and the mass media.

When asked about their human or mass media role models during the fifties and sixties, both women identified their mothers, first and foremost, as the main influence on their concepts of femininity. Interestingly, the reasons for this maternal influence are quite different in each case.

¹ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 42.

² Douglas, 55.

For Betty, her mother was a necessary antidote to the barrage of mass media images that assaulted her, particularly in her adolescent years. Betty grew up in the southern California beach culture. She knew at the time that she did not fit the surfer girl model. She also had a subscription to Seventeen Magazine. She was in awe of the models in Seventeen, but did not ever think that she could attain that physical representation of femininity. These experiences were painful for Betty, but she knew that her mother represented an admirable alternative.

“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.”³

Nora’s situation was quite different. She was and is an avid reader. However, she did not read mass market magazines “magazines were for adults.” Instead she read hundreds of fairy tales and children’s books from other eras, such as *Little Women*. Therefore, she points out, her mass media feminine role models would’ve been from a couple of generations earlier. Nora rarely watched TV. However, she does remember seeing *Leave it to Beaver* and that it caused her to “cringe with embarrassment.”⁴ The reason for this, she said, is because she was getting counter-influences, such as her mother. Her mother certainly did not fit the June Cleaver model.

“There was the whole beat generation that existed right after the war. And many, many women, including my mother, were part of that. So intellectual women who were not necessarily intellectual in the sense that they were very, very good at school, were drawn into a ferment of artistic and intellectual and political examination.”⁵

³ Betty Stone interview by

June 28, 2008, transcript, p. 1.

⁴ Nora Logan interview by

June 26, 2008, transcript, p. 2.

⁵ Nora Logan interview by

June 26, 2008, transcript, p. 2.

Another way in which their mothers were rather atypical role models is that ^bBoth Nora and Betty's mother's worked outside of the home. But their work experiences were unlike Douglas' portrayal of the middle-class housewife who had to work to afford the modern conveniences she so coveted.

Betty's mother also worked out of the home both before and after she had a family. Betty's mother was college educated, with a BA in Economics. Her first job out of college was as a government-funded researcher. Ironically, she gathered data about woman employed as part of the war effort and about these women's plan to stay in the work force after the war. Not long after this, her mother married Betty's dad and left the work force while she raised four children. However, when the youngest child was in first grade, Betty's mother returned to college. She was a teacher for 20 years.

Nora's mother was divorced when she was very young. Nora lived with her maternal grandparents for several years during the fifties while her mother worked in New York City as film editor for a production company. So, though she already had a child, Nora's mother made the decision to be a career woman. After several years, her mother met and married her stepfather. At this point, Nora learned something new from her mother about femininity. She related the following memory about a conversation between her mother and herself:

"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."⁶

So, in some ways, Nora's mother did want to conform to female societal expectations of the time, or perhaps of an earlier time. Perhaps the reason that Betty and Nora's mothers' lives took

⁶ Nora Logan interview by

the trajectories that they did is related to *their* upbringings. Both Nora and Betty's mothers grew up in privileged circumstances. According to Nora,

"The image that I get from my mother's parents is there were certain events that accompanied certain economic levels, and when you reached that economic level, in order to be part of it, you had to participate in those events. They had servants in the house. They had a gardener. My grandmother took painting lessons, took some of the first European cooking classes offered in this country, was a volunteer at the hospital. All of these are things woman of a certain social set did. And none of it was supposed to interfere with the running of the family."⁷

Doubtless this is where Nora's mother learned her standards of femininity, though the leisure class specificity of this role model did not necessarily serve her well in her own life, a life that did not include servants. However, this is the feminine image her mother passed along to Nora, without much mass media influence to cloud this message.

Betty is very clear about the fact that her mother was very influenced by her grandmother.

"My mom, I think, is an aberrant example because her mother was a very strong person. When my grandmother was 33 or 34, my grandfather committed suicide. 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."⁸

It is evident that Betty comes from a line of strong woman. Perhaps this is why she was able to put mass media concepts of femininity in perspective.

⁷ Nora Logan interview by

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

⁸ Betty Stone interview by

June 28, 2008, transcript, p. 1.

It is clear that there is not the universal experience for baby boomer woman that Susan Douglas describes. Though mass media representations of femininity flourished during this time, some woman were able to resist the pull of this influence. In some cases, it may be because some woman respected their mothers for their strength and intelligence instead of reviling them for their inability to adapt to mass media perpetuated norms. Perhaps Douglas is as guilty of perpetuating stereotypes as the mass media that she lambasts, but with which she seems inexorably tied.

A

Nora Logan-

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.

The image that I get from my mother's parents is there were certain events that accompanied certain economic levels, and when you reached that economic level, in order to be part of it, you had to participate in those events. They had servants in the house. They had a gardener. My grandmother took painting lessons, took some of the first European cooking classes offered in this country, was a volunteer at the hospital. All of these are things woman of a certain social set did. And none of it was supposed to interfere with the running of the family

(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.

It gave you the image of Hoovering the house with your high heels and full skirt, but it also gave a lot of other images. Btu it also gave many other types of images of women.

Say. Jackie Kennedy. She was in some ways the perfect wife, but there was something subversive about her. There was something subversive about the whole idea of the Kennedys. She was slightly racy. There was the whole beat generation that existed right after the war. And many, many women, including my mother, were part of that. So intellectual women who were not necessarily intellectual in the sense that they were very, very good at school, were drawn into a ferment of artistic and intellectual and political examination.

Then a little place like Greenwich Village was in Life Magazine, So what would have been local became universal. What would have been local became universal through the media. So the media became the projection of a lot of bumping into each other stereotypes. They were all mixed up in there together. You could turn the page and could see Ann Margaret in pedal pushers, with a big beehive hairdo and a tight blouse, and on the next page you could see some girl in white gloves and a little pillbox hat stepping demurely into a Ford DeSoto, and on the next page a lingerie ad, which was very racy at the time, and on the next page you could see how to make a Jell-o mold for your family. This was in Family Circle or something like that. So it was all really mixed up.

People began to examine, in my generation, the whole concept of what it meant to be a good girl and a bad girl. Because those were terms that were still used then seriously. In Movies. My best friend in fifth and sixth grade had this enormous crush on Tab Hunter. So we went to see all his movies. He was this big blonde. They would lie in fields and roll around on the blanket. It was all discreet and done with Vaseline. And there was Elvis Presley for Lord's sake. That whole rockin' and reelin' was a huge relief and release.

Good girls were girls who basically didn't have legs. Bad girls were girls who had legs and knew it. A bad girl would have a one-on-one relationship with a boy. A good girl would be part of the tribe of women, and say no to a man until he had given her what she wanted. It was a woman's power and good girls thought bad girls gave away their power and got nothing in exchange. Bad girls thought good girls were stuck up and manipulative and wouldn't have fun (i.e. sex) without payment, as in a marriage. Tab Hunter and Elvis Presley were the boys that bad girls went out with. They brought that steamier, more free-flowing side of sex, into a much more puritanical, or a least pseudo-puritanical America. Because that's what the advertisers were selling, was the perfect

American family. And how could you afford all of the appliances if you were out there rockin and rolling and drinking? People who were educated laughed at Tab Hunter and Elvis Presley. Because it was kind of the other side of tracks. And people didn't cross over much. You were kind of stuck on one side or another.

The Beatles presented themselves as being classless. And because they were British, Americans couldn't place them. They made sex absolutely pure, absolutely romantic, but it had an edge of amused cynicism which was very compelling. Because people could 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 -

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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) <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly stated thesis, but the paper inadequately sustains the argument; thesis is unclear, but the paper sustains an argument (26 - 24) <input type="checkbox"/> Poorly stated thesis, inadequately supports argument, poor organization (23 - 18) <input type="checkbox"/> No thesis or argument (17 - 0)	27
Where the Girls Are	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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) <input 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) <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of interviewee responses using Susan Douglas's <i>Where the Girls Are</i> , without incorporating and analyzing quotes from Douglas (23 - 18) <input type="checkbox"/> Paper does not use Douglas's <i>Where the Girls Are</i> to analyze interviewee responses (17 - 0)	27
Writing Style and Mechanics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks one of these conventions (26 - 24) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks two of these conventions (23 - 18) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper is incomprehensible due to errors in language or usage (17 - 0)	28
Interview and Transcript	<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) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks one of these requirements (26 - 24) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks two of these requirements (23 - 18) <input type="checkbox"/> The writer does not provide the transcript of the interview (17 - 0)	30
Citation Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The paper correctly and consistently uses footnotes and the Chicago Manual of Style format when citing (30 - 27) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper attempts to use footnotes and the Chicago Manual of Style format when citing but does so incorrectly (26 - 24) <input type="checkbox"/> The paper uses a citation style used in another discipline, such as APA or MLA (23 - 18) <input type="checkbox"/> 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) <u>*See "Citation Format" tab on Blackboard for more information on how to cite correctly using footnotes and the Chicago Manual of Style</u>	30

95%

142/150

