The Second Shift
*Transcending the Family/Work Paradigm One Push-Up Bra at a Time*

Kayomi Wada

Sitting in Starbucks drinking a tall non-fat vanilla latte with the lid off (because it feels more like home), she looks vaguely pensive, or perhaps, dissatisfied with her drink. She has amazing luck, and with such, has landed us the only two comfy looking chairs in the café. I have my red spiral notebook and ballpoint pen awaiting any knowledge of a life not my own. I realize there is too much to write about. Looking down at my pages of scribbles, I try to not let her notice how confident I am that I’m just wasting time.

Arlie Hochschild completed her groundbreaking book on women’s work *The Second Shift* in 1990. A quick look at Amazon.com shows that since then, 823 documents have cited her book as a resource. The book details how women have made improvements in the workplace, but in addition to full-time careers, still do the vast majority of housework and child care. This essay is really just me interviewing my mom Helen; it is not a milestone in feminist studies. However, through my conversations with her, I have decided to reclaim the “Second Shift” to reflect my mother’s experience, and perhaps a whole legion of women the book skipped over.

Not all women had trouble juggling the demands of work and family; women like my mother found that obstacle all too easy to overcome. The real “Second Shift” was all about staying beautiful while climbing up the corporate ladder.

“I walked into a meeting, the only female in a business suit. Hair up in curls. The Chief Financial Officer turned around and announced ‘Helen, your hair up makes your eyes look so beautiful!’ I was getting attention because of my looks. It was great, everyone knew my name.”

Wanting to have some extra money while in high school, Helen got a job at a drive-in movie theater. She would pop popcorn and pour soda into plastic cups for the people who weren’t busy exchanging bodily fluids in the backseat of their cars. Nice job, but she was only paid $2.35 an hour. She went
looking for a second job to help supplement her income.

Landing a job at the police station was just the ticket. This too, only paid $2.35 an hour, but was exciting enough to be worth it. Not to mention all the cute cops. Helen would meet her future husband while typing away at her desk.

Helen graduated with honors from Fife High School and received two scholarships to attend a school of higher education. She also turned 18, which meant she had to go find a place of her own. She quit her two jobs in search of full-time employment.

At a local glass company, Helen was able to get full-time employment as a customer service manager. Here, she was no stranger to the angry customer who wanted to yell at the first person to answer the phone. Although the job was very stressful, she excelled at it. With her new job, she was forced to choose between full-time employment and higher education. After two quarters of Tacoma Community College, she left for good. This turned out to be one of the best decisions she ever made.

Because she was no longer distracted by schooling, Helen focused all her efforts on advancing her career. Even though she had no experience with food service, she was hired as an assistant manager at a local McDonald’s: a considerable raise in income, with a salary of $17,000 a year.

Working at McDonald’s was a real pain in the ass. All the people under her hated their meaningless and under-paid jobs, so they never came to work. This had the undesirable effect of making the general manager cry at least three times a week. The general manager believed all her employees hated her. She was an emotionally unstable woman.

Thankfully, there were some perks to working there. The night shift ended around 2 AM, and the McDonald’s night crew would all head down the street to share milkshakes and horror stories at the local Denny’s. It was here that Helen had a life-changing epiphany, hey I can do this. She realized that she could achieve more than yelling at the fry guy; she applied to Denny’s.

She got an interview and killed it with matching suit and heels. That’s putting it too simply let me back up a bit. Her interview was at the then Denny’s corporate headquarters in Bellevue. She dressed up real nice and came prepared to ace the interrogation.

It was a nice building, very corporate looking, i.e. streamlined,
unemotional, to the point. She found Human Resources and checked in with the receptionist. She was only waiting a few moments in the lobby when a guy who looked like John Curley invited her into his office. John Curley, you know that guy from Evening Magazine? Blonde hair, blue eyes, kind of looks like a schmuck. A know-it-all schmuck. The kind of guy that no one really likes, but who is just so unthreatening that no one really hates him either; even though they want to, because he is such a schmuck.

It is important to note that to this day Helen remembers the time he came back from a vacation and had a scarlet, bulbous, inhuman boil in the middle of his forehead. According to Helen's records, no one was able to look him in the eye for weeks.

Once situated in his office she handled the interview with valor. She was expecting every question asked of her, and answered with extraordinary poise. It wasn't until Blue Eyes asked her, "Do you plan on having kids in the near future?" that she was taken aback even for a moment. Yet, even here she came out victorious. With a simple no and shake of the head she deflected his sexist blow. "Well, that's very good, I am always nervous that I will be losing the company's training money on a woman of child bearing age." He put aside his sexism for a moment, and hired her. Two months later she was pregnant with her first daughter.

Helen worked all the way through her pregnancy. She took her three months' maternity leave and one week of vacation, coming back to work with no problem. In fact, she was so good at her job that barely two years into it she was up for another promotion.

Blue Eyes invited her into his office again. He was obviously impressed with her success, and had no problem choosing her over the other two applicants, both males, whom she was competing with for the job. It was three months after this promotion that she became pregnant with her second daughter.

Again, she worked through her pregnancy, and again, she was up for promotion. She, of course, got the promotion and now had the intimidating title of Safety and Loss Manager. It was a pretty sweet job. She got a company car, a Ford Taurus. It was a comfortable, four door sedan with excellent safety ratings and automatic transmission. Conan O'Brien drives one. He loves it.

Helen liked her new job; she was able to travel (both kids in tow) and
had plenty of responsibilities and authority. While on a routine inspection of a restaurant, she noticed the fan above one of the cooking surfaces wouldn’t turn on. She unscrewed a few of the screws, and realized that the fan had chopped up so many cockroach bodies that it could no longer turn: all the pieces of cockroach were holding the fan blades in place.

Rising to the occasion, Helen told the General Manager to put a sign on the door saying “closed for repairs,” and not to let any more customers in. As for the customers in the store, they were kept in the dark, and everything was put on hold until they finished their meals. After all the customers were gone, Helen called an exterminator to come exhume the bodies and kill the rest of the cockroach family. As soon as this was concluded, she finished her report and let the store re-open for business. The whole ordeal took only a few hours, and no one, other than the employees present, knew what was going on. She handled it so well that the newspapers did not even hear about the story. Needless to say, she was promoted again.

This time she was sent to a more specialized unit, Food Safety. It was her job to ensure that all the food that was served in her region was safe. So, when a customer reported that he had found a whole mouse in his soup, she was assigned to the case.

Apparently, a customer had ordered the “home-style chili” and when he went to take a bite, he found a mouse staring back at him with its beady little black eyes glazed over with death. Helen instructed the General Manager of the store to retrieve the mouse and send it to their forensic team in South Carolina. Yes, most major companies have their own forensic teams. Once the mouse was received, they ran tests to see at what point the mouse jumped into the chili.

All chili is manufactured at one factory and then frozen for transport across long distances. Therefore, if the mouse decided to take a swim in one of the big chili pots where the chili is brewed, the mouse would have had to be frozen at one point. The scientists discovered that the little mouse carcass had never been below the freezing point.

Another spot where mice like to fall into chili is from a ledge in the kitchen, tumbling into the heating pot at the restaurant where it is being served. However, the standard temperature that chili must be heated up to is 165 degrees, a temperature the tiny mouse body had never experienced. Not
to mention that the ladle used to scoop the chili from the heating pot and into the customer’s bowl was too small for the mouse to fit into. So, the only way the mouse could have slipped into the bowl was if it took a dive into the bowl itself. However, there would be no reason for a mouse to die in that condition, since it’s just a bowl of chili.

The customer who filed the complaint was notified of these results, and quickly dropped the lawsuit he was launching. The cause of death is still unknown at this point, but it seems the corpse was mishandled and dunked in chili. I would like to think that the mouse died of natural causes, but we may never know the extent of foul play involved. Rest in peace, mouse.

Helen, being so clever and all, couldn’t help but be promoted again. This time she went to work in Assets Protection, where she busted bad guys. That was pretty much it. Just got shady reports, checked them out, and busted the bad guys. Lonely work since nobody ever wanted to see you. Lucky for her, this was just another stepping stone.

Being a Regional Manager would become the stunning finale to an action-packed career. At this point Helen was making well over a six-figure income and had a prestigious job title, just inches away from the top. So she quit. Everybody gets bored sometimes, can’t blame her. A glass ceiling was mentioned in passing; Helen did not want to dwell on it.

“I believe in staying healthy and living a long life. I’ve been able to convince over 1,400 people that my gym provides for this.”

After leaving Denny’s, Helen decided to open up her own gym. She said too many talk-show hosts warned her that a high stress job would lead to an early death. She also mentioned something about a mid-life crisis.

Looking for a building to lease ended up being more fun than Helen had anticipated. She worked with Ben Norby, a tall, blonde, blue-eyed, young commercial real estate agent to help her find a place for the gym. He even invited her out to a bar, but Helen said she refused because it would be too “unprofessional.” After considering several different locations, Helen decided on a nice little spot in DuPont, near Fort Lewis.

Having a gym near Fort Lewis, Helen knew she needed a “very attractive lady” to work the front desk and “entice the military men to join.”
So, when Kelly, a 25 year old with long blonde hair and a super skinny body applied, Helen couldn’t refuse. Kelly came to the job interview wearing flip-flops, capris, and a really tight T-shirt that showed off her body. If she were interviewing with any other sort of company she might have been deemed a bit too unprofessional, but she was exactly what Helen was looking for. To put it into perspective, even Helen’s real estate agent had a crush on Kelly.

But Helen had to hire more than just front desk help; she needed personal trainers as well. She hired Irene (35), Amy (25), and Jenny (32). Oddly enough, they have all had breast augmentations, have less than 15% body fat, and like to wear make-up when they work out. However, there was one personal trainer who didn’t quite work out.

Because of the potential embarrassment involved with the following story, the young man involved will be referred to as “Porn Boy.” Sifting through a pile of potential candidates for a personal training position, Helen came across Porn Boy’s resume. On it he had attached a black and white photo of himself. Helen cannot remember what his face looked like but she is sure it was attractive. What she remembers is that he was shirtless and his pants were so low it showed “his indents” (the very lowest part of the abdomen where it comes to a “V” above the crotch). According to Helen he had an “eight-pack” which is “much better than a six-pack.” In the photo, even though it was black and white, it was obvious that he had poured bronzing oil all over himself. It was a picture you might find on the intro page to a pornographic website. Helen hired him.

He was fired within a month because he cancelled on customers, and scolded Helen not to “pull shit” with him. Before working at her gym, he had a job as a personal trainer in Elma; he now works as a trainer in Tumwater. If you receive a resume with a black and white photo attached showing off the candidate’s “indents” you may have come across Porn Boy, be advised.

Just as she was successful at Denny’s, Helen has been very successful running her own business. At the moment she is opening another gym in Yelm. Although most people don’t make a profit for three years into their business venture, two years into her business Helen already had enough to reinvest and diversify.

“I believe that if you are given the gift of looks, you should use them to the
extreme to get whatever you desire... Yes, I have said that to you and your sister, it’s a good lesson to learn.”

Helen is embarrassingly good looking. When her two daughters would bring home boyfriends, the chaps could not help but comment on how stunning she was. She gave her daughters very real competition.

Although taller than both daughters, Helen weighs much less. She is 5’8” and 130 lbs. She always wants to lose “at least 5 more pounds.” She has striking reddish-blond hair with countless shades of lighter blonde to highlight it. Her hair always has lots of “volume” with perfectly coiffed, curled bangs. Her hair just brushes the nape of her neck, but is always accented with a large round brush to achieve an anti-gravitational bounce. She usually wears a tight pair of Nike pants and a fitted T-shirt, her company logo blazoned across her breasts. This outfit is usually finished off with a pair of Puma purple sneakers which are much too small for her feet, but make them look “smaller, more petite.”

Her daily routine for cosmetics is very consistent. First, she cleanses with an anti-aging face wash. She then uses an anti-aging face moisturizer to further the effect. Then begins the makeup application. First, she uses a double matte foundation to give her skin an airbrushed, porcelain finish. Then she uses an eye shadow primer in a natural color to keep her eye makeup in place. After that, she applies smoky green eyeliner to her upper and lower lid, making sure the line does not extend beyond her natural eye contours. She applies a light coating of khaki (smoky green) eye shadow from the lash line to the crease of her eyelid. She never applies shadow above the natural crease of her eyelid because that would be too “unnatural.” She then carefully curls each set of eyelashes, holding them in the curler for exactly 10 seconds a-piece. She applies three layers of black mascara to the top and bottom set of lashes on each eye. For her blush, which she only uses “as needed,” she applies a light coating of bronze, focusing on the apples of her cheeks. Her look is completed by applying a “lip plumper” (this shit burns) followed by a nude lipstick called “fawn.”

In case of emergency, she always carries extra makeup. On her at all times are foundation, eye shadow, eyeliner, and lipstick. However, on the day of the interview, I found other items as well. In her cosmetics carrying case
were: foundation, two dual packs of eye shadow, eyeliner, that lip plumper of which I had the regrettable idea of putting on myself, lipstick, three lip glosses, and a compact with two mirrors.

For her hairdo, she always makes sure to towel-dry first, so as not to frizz out her hair. After that, she applies a hair protectorant, so the heat styling will not damage her locks. On top of the protectorant she works in a volumizing mousse which helps give her hair more texture. With the blow dryer, she leans over upside down to dry the roots of her hair first, which gives her hair more dimension. She finishes off by sectioning off her hair and rolling it on a large round brush to set it perfectly for the day.

Beyond her impeccable hygiene, she also works out all the time to keep her body firm and flawless. This is made easier since she owns a gym and is there every day. Also, all her employees are gorgeous; I’m sure working with them keeps her motivated. She works out on a regular basis alone, or with one of the many personal trainers that are employed by her. The results are amazing, if you know anyone in their mid-forties who has gone through childbirth twice, they do not look like Helen. There is just no comparison to a regular person. As with everything else she does, she works very hard to maintain her beauty, and is very successful.

Sometimes maintaining beauty is painful. About eight years ago, Helen went through plastic surgery to revive her breasts and perk up her eyes. As with any surgery, there were risks involved, and my mom woke up while she was getting her eye-lift.

The doctor made an incision a bit above her hairline so he would be able to reach in and pull the meat up from under her eye and eliminate the “sag” that had occurred over the years. Unfortunately, when doing this, Helen awakened, and sat up on the operating table; this unexpected move caused the doctor’s scalpel to slip, and he cut open her scalp. The human scalp bleeds profusely when you cut it open. It took an additional four hours to stop the bleeding and finish the surgery. She is OK now, all the stitches are gone, and there is no visible scar.

In addition, she recently had green eyeliner tattooed to her upper and lower eyelids. In this procedure, she was awake the whole time; they just injected a local anesthetic to her eyelid. This injection did not numb her eyelids, but it was supposed to cut down on some of the pain. According to
Helen, getting these tattoos was the greatest pain she ever experienced except for childbirth. It was exponentially worse than getting her breasts augmented or her eyes lifted. Not to mention that it was done at a salon in the mall, which was awkward.

Helen is planning on getting more “work done” as time goes by and would like to maintain her current level of beauty throughout her lifetime. She is not opposed to further facial surgery, even with the mishap, because she knows it was a fluke. All her employees have had plastic surgery, and she believes everyone would if they had the money, so she doesn’t feel weird about it.

“I don’t get it. Your title doesn’t make sense to me, I don’t consider being beautiful a ‘Second Shift.’ It’s my whole life.”

Interviewing my mother was no easy task. I wanted to get all my facts right and leave no relevant rock unturned. I cleared every draft of this essay with her so there would be no surprises and no sucker-punches made in her direction. The only thing we disagreed about was the title of this essay.

My mom doesn’t consider herself a feminist and never has. The closest she comes to using the “F” word is in relation to a commercial she remembers. ENJOLI perfume was popular in the late 70’s and early 80’s and had an unforgettable jingle: “You can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never let him forget he’s a man.” My mom loved that the woman who sang the jingle was really sexy and powerful at the same time. This was exactly the image she wanted to craft for herself: feminine, charming, attracting the male gaze, pleasing to men, yet still economically independent and successful.

After extensively interviewing my mom, I knew she wasn’t a feminist icon; she wouldn’t want to be anyway. However, in taking down her story I knew I was doing something as a young feminist. It wasn’t twisting her words to prove some underlying political point; she and I made sure this wasn’t happening by reviewing everything I wrote. But it was something.

After completing draft after draft, I figured it out. What she was doing was unrecognized work. Unpaid, traditionally female labor is always undervalued and rarely, if ever, seen as “real work.” After this epiphany, I didn’t see my mom’s beauty ritual as vain or pointless; it was work that isn’t
recognized as such in a patriarchal society.

Unfortunately for me, my mom disagreed. This was the one point of contention in my essay. She wanted her cosmetics routine and plastic surgery to be seen as part of her “vanity disease.” My mom remains convinced that she has a disease that makes her vain. The facts presented in this essay are accurate if you see them through my mom’s perspective or mine; I hope you enjoyed this memorial to my hero.