From Gendered Images to Social Transformation: Deconstructing the Myth of Multitasking Woman in Light of Miriam Cooke's Theory of " Imageness" And Arlie Hochschild's Theory of "Second Shift"

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the contemporary social image of the multitasking woman as a gendered construct that places disproportionate expectations on women, particularly working women. Drawing on Miriam Cooke's concept of "Imageness" and Arley Russell Hochschild's theory of "Second Shift," the study argues that the contemporary celebration of women's ability to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously can mask a persistent structure of gender inequality. While multitasking is often portrayed as evidence of women's strength, independence, competence, and empowerment, it can also be a social expectation that requires women to combine professional work with domestic work, childcare, nurturing, and emotional labor. Cooke's analysis of gender representations provides a framework for examining how social images are constructed, generalized, and imposed on women, while Hochschild's concept of second shift illustrates how paid work does not necessarily liberate women from traditional domestic responsibilities. Therefore, this paper distinguishes between a woman's ability to multitask and the social expectation that she should multitask. The study argues that the problem lies not in women's ability to perform multiple roles, but rather in the gendered transformation of this ability into an obligation and a measure of feminine worth. It concludes that true empowerment cannot be achieved simply by encouraging women to take on increased responsibilities. Instead, social transformation requires dismantling the idealized, multitasking woman, redistributing domestic and caregiving responsibilities, and developing social norms based on shared responsibility, equality, and individual choice.

Keywords: Miriam Cook, imageness, gender images, multitasking women, Arley Hochschild, second shift, working woman, gender roles, unpaid domestic work, social transformation, gender equality

INTRODUCTION

The social image of women has undergone a significant transformation throughout modern history. In many traditional societies, women were primarily associated with domestic life, motherhood, obedience, caregiving, and responsibility for the family. However, with the expansion of women's education and participation in professional life, the image of femininity has changed dramatically. The modern woman is often portrayed as educated, financially independent, professionally successful, emotionally supportive, physically present for her family, and capable of managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

At first glance, this shift appears to be a sign of progress. The modern woman is no longer exclusively represented as a homemaker whose identity is confined to the domestic sphere. She is increasingly present in universities, workplaces, public institutions, politics, business, science, and other professional fields. But alongside this apparent shift, another expectation has emerged: women are expected to succeed in all areas without relinquishing any of their traditional responsibilities.

Thus, the modern ideal often resembles the idea of the "multitasking woman." She is expected to be a successful employee, an attentive mother, a supportive wife, an effective homemaker, a caregiver, and an emotionally available family member all at once. Celebrating this ability may seem empowering because it emphasizes a woman's competence and resilience. However, the same representation can become restrictive when it transforms an individual's ability into a social obligation.

This issue can be approached through Miriam Cooke's concept of "imageness." In her book *Women Claim Islam*, Cooke examines the ways in which representations of women are produced and disseminated, and how women can negotiate, challenge, and transform the identities imposed upon them. The book's chapter "Multiple Critiques" explicitly includes a section titled "Imageness," making it particularly relevant to the study of socially produced representations of women. Cooke's broader studies also demonstrate how women can challenge dominant narratives by producing alternative representations of themselves, rather than remaining confined to externally imposed identities. How can preconception built on the weak but resilient foundations of myth and image be overcome? Images are flat impressions that provide pieces of information. Like photographs, they frame and freeze a fragment of the real and then project it as the whole. What was dynamic and changing becomes static. Just as a snapshot provides a true, if partial, picture, so these cultural images contain some truth. That is why they are so hard to change.(Cooke,2001,p:126)

Arley Russell Hochschild's *The Second Shift* provides a complementary sociological perspective. Hochschild's study examines dual-career households and demonstrates that a woman's participation in paid employment does not automatically absolve her of responsibility for housework and childcare. The revised edition continues to explore the unequal distribution of domestic labor in working households.

By combining these two perspectives, this study suggests that the multitasking woman can be understood as a contemporary gender image. Cook helps explain the production and operation of socially constructed images, while Hochschild provides a framework for understanding the material consequences of these expectations in women's daily lives.

Research Problem

Women's participation in education and employment has led to their increased visibility in the public and professional spheres. However, the expansion of women's public roles has not always been accompanied by an equitable redistribution of domestic responsibilities.

This creates a paradox. Society increasingly tells women that they are capable of "doing everything," while simultaneously expecting them to continue performing many responsibilities traditionally associated with women. The result is an idealized image of the woman who can successfully combine a career, family, household management, childcare, caregiving, and emotional work.

Therefore, the research problem addressed in this paper is the transformation of women's ability to multitask into a societal expectation. When multitasking becomes a criterion for judging whether a woman is successful, responsible, or "good," it ceases to be merely an individual skill and becomes a gendered social norm.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is the contemporary image of the multitasking woman constructed and reinforced by gender-related social expectations?
2. How can Miriam Cooke's concept of image be applied to the construction of the contemporary image of the multitasking woman?
3. How does Arley Hochschild's concept of the second shift explain the unequal distribution of professional and domestic responsibilities experienced by working women?
4. In what ways can celebrating women's multitasking transform ability into commitment?

5. How can deconstructing the image of the multitasking woman contribute to broader social transformation and gender equality?

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Examine the multitasking woman as a contemporary gendered social image.
2. Apply Miriam Cooke's concept of image to the construction of women's social identities.
3. Examine the relevance of Hochschild's theory of the second shift to the experiences of working women.
4. Distinguishing between a woman's capacity for multitasking and societal expectations that she must multitask.
5. Identifying the unequal distribution of domestic, professional, and emotional responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, analytical, and critical theoretical methodology. It does not attempt to statistically measure women's multitasking abilities. Instead, it examines the social meaning associated with women's multitasking and analyzes the underlying ideological assumptions.

The primary theoretical sources are Miriam Cooke's *Women ClaimIslam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* and Arley Russell Hochschild and Ann Machong's *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. Cooke's work provides the conceptual foundation for examining gender representations, while Hochschild's social framework is used to examine the relationship between paid work and unpaid domestic work. Cooke's book, published by Routledge in 2001, includes a chapter titled "Multiple Critique," which explicitly includes a section titled " Imageness." The study employs textual and conceptual analysis to identify recurring assumptions about the ideal woman. The analysis proceeds from the construction of the social image to the burden that image produces, and finally to the possibility of challenging it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1)Miriam Cooke and the Concept of Imageness

Miriam Cookes concept is particularly concerned with the ways in which women are represented in mainstream cultural, political, religious, and literary narratives. Her book, *Women Claim Islam*, examines Arab Muslim women writers who challenge their marginalization from historical and mainstream narratives and construct alternative identities through their own writing.

One of the important sections of the book is “multiple critique,” which includes the concept of “ imageness.” This concept is useful for the current study because it directs attention to the relationship between representation and identity. The social image does not simply describe an existing reality. It can participate in producing expectations about what women should be.

Cooke’s broader work demonstrates how dominant representations can reduce the diversity of women to simplistic identities. In her discussion of the “Muslim woman,” for example, Cooke describes how Muslim women can be collectively reduced to a single symbolic identity that erases their diversity. This observation is particularly relevant to the current argument because the modern multitasking woman can similarly become a generalized archetype.

The problem arises when the following assumptions become socially entrenched:

*A good woman must manage the household efficiently.

*A successful woman must maintain a successful career.

*A good mother must remain constantly available to her children.

*A good wife must provide emotional support.

*And a competent woman should be able to manage all these responsibilities simultaneously.

At this point, the image of the multitasking woman becomes more than just a representation; it becomes an expectation. Thus, Cooke's approach enables the researcher to ask not only, "What image of femininity is being represented?" But also, "Who produces this image, what values does it carry, and what happens when women are expected to conform to it?"

2)Arley Hochschild and the Second Shift

Hochschild's book, The Second Shift, provides the necessary social dimension for this research. Originally published in 1989 with Anne Machung, the book examines the experiences of working parents and the distribution of domestic responsibilities (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 1–10).

The central concept of the "second shift" refers to unpaid work performed after paid work. A working woman may complete her professional day and then begin another set of responsibilities at home: cooking, cleaning, childcare, organizing family activities, caring for relatives, and managing household needs (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 3–6). As Hochschild observes, "Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a 'second shift' at home" (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 4). Calculation of this time burden revealed that over a year, working mothers put in an extra month of 24-hour days compared to their partners, creating what Hochschild terms a distinct "leisure gap" between men and women (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 3–4).

The revised 2012 edition continues this examination of working families and includes updated discussions on housework, childcare, gender roles, and the persistent unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, pp. xi–xxi). Hochschild thus enables the current study to move beyond representation to concrete experience. If Cooke helps us question how the image of the ideal woman is constructed, Hochschild helps us question what happens when women try to live according to that image (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 18–21).

Traditional gender ideology often confines women to the private sphere (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 15–18). The ideal woman has been represented as a wife, mother, homemaker, caregiver, and moral guardian of the family. Her worth has often been measured by how effectively she performs these roles. Domestic work has been treated as an integral part of femininity, not as work that requires recognition or equitable distribution (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 25–28).

The Emergence of the Working Woman

The working woman represents a significant shift in the social image of femininity. She is educated, economically active, professionally ambitious, and has a visible presence in public life. This shift can rightly be understood as an important dimension of women's empowerment.

However, the emergence of the working woman creates a paradox when professional participation is added to domestic responsibilities rather than replacing them (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 8–10). Thus, the question is not whether women should work outside the home. The more important question is whether the social organization of domestic work has changed at the same pace as women's participation in paid employment (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 12–13).

Hochschild's work illustrates why this question is important. Having two workers within the household does not automatically lead to equal participation in domestic work (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 8–11). Even among dual-earner couples, women perform two-thirds of the daily, time-bound chores—such as preparing meals at fixed hours—whereas men often perform tasks that allow greater temporal flexibility (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 8–9).

The Modern Superwoman

The modern ideal goes beyond the working woman. It constructs a woman who is expected to succeed everywhere.

She must be:

* Professionally successful

* Financially responsible

* Physically attractive

* Emotionally available

* A caring mother

* A supportive wife

* An effective homemaker

* A provider

* Socially active

* Personally fulfilled

This image is often celebrated as proof of female strength. Hochschild explicitly critique this archetype, noting that "the image of the supermom... obscures the strain" experienced by women juggling these dual demands (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 23).

The Myth of the Multitasker

Capability vs. Commitment

The most important distinction in this paper is between capability and commitment. There is nothing inherently demanding about multitasking. Women may choose to perform multiple roles, and many women derive satisfaction and identity from different aspects of their lives. The problem arises when society transforms this possibility into an expectation. The difference can be represented as follows:

The first allows for freedom. The second creates pressure.

When society praises a woman for "doing it all," the compliment can unintentionally mask the amount of work required to maintain that image (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 194–196). A woman who juggles a full-time job, children, housework, caregiving, and emotional responsibilities can be described as "strong." But labeling her strong doesn't eliminate the inequality that requires her to perform all these roles. As Hochschild notes, working mothers in this system become the primary "lightning rods for family aggressions aroused by the speed-up of work and family life" (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 10).

Expectations of Perfection

The image of multitasking is closely linked to expectations of perfection. A woman may be expected not only to perform multiple roles but to do them successfully. Failure in one area can be interpreted as a personal shortcoming rather than evidence of excessive societal expectations (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 195–198).

For example, a working mother struggling to balance professional deadlines and childcare may feel she has failed as a mother. A woman who prioritizes professional responsibilities may be judged as neglecting her family. A woman who prioritizes family may be criticized for lacking career ambition.

Hochschild observes that women in two-job families frequently speak of being "overtired, sick, and 'emotionally drained'", often talking about sleep "the way a hungry person talks about food" (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 10). Therefore, the ideal multitasking woman is placed in a difficult position: every choice she makes can be measured against other expectations. The problem is not just the number of tasks, but the moralizing associated with those tasks.

The Multitasking Woman and the Second Shift

Professional Work

For working women, the first shift consists of formal employment (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 2). This might include teaching, management, medicine, business, research, technology, law, or any other professional occupation. Women are expected to meet professional standards, deadlines, performance requirements, and organizational expectations. Professional equality requires that women be evaluated based on their work, not gender stereotypes. However, professional engagement alone does not eliminate domestic responsibilities.

Domestic Work

After professional work, domestic responsibilities often continue (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 3–6). The second shift might include:

* Preparing meals
* Cleaning
* Laundry
* Shopping
* Organizing children's schedules
* Supervising education
* Caring for elderly family members
* Managing family finances
* Maintaining family relationships

These responsibilities may not appear in formal employment statistics, but they require time, physical energy, planning, and emotional resources (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 8–10). Hochschild's research made the unequal distribution of such work clear by examining working households and asking who actually does the housework (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 1–11).

Emotional Work

The burden extends far beyond physical housework. Women are also expected to maintain the emotional well-being of family members (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 32–35). They may be responsible for remembering birthdays, anticipating family needs, maintaining relationships, comforting children, supporting partners, and resolving conflicts—what Hochschild terms the unrecognized "emotional work" involved in sustaining household stability (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 32–38). This dimension of responsibility makes

multitasking more complex than simply performing several physical tasks. A woman may therefore be working simultaneously on three levels:

From Empowerment to Burden

The image of the multitasking woman masks this complexity by reducing it to the positive language of "strength" and "competence" (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 23–24). Therefore, the contemporary celebration of multitasking must be critically examined. There is a difference between saying:

> "Women are capable of doing many things."

And saying:

> "Women should be capable of doing everything."

The first statement acknowledges potential. The second establishes a standard. This distinction is central to this study. If multitasking becomes the standard of successful femininity, women who cannot or do not wish to perform multiple roles may be judged negatively (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 195–198). Thus, the language of empowerment can sometimes reproduce the very expectations it seems to challenge. A woman who works outside the home may be told she is empowered because she has a career. But if she remains solely responsible for housework, achieving professional independence does not necessarily lead to equality (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 12–15).

Assimilation of the Multitasking Image

Gender-related images become especially powerful when they are internalized (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 15–18; Cooke, 2001). A woman may begin to believe that asking for help is a sign of weakness. She may feel guilty when she takes personal time. She may think that a "good mother" should always be available. And she may consider household responsibilities her natural duty, even when she works full-time—what Hochschild identifies as the psychological strategy of maintaining a "gender strategy" to suppress resentment (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 15–19). Thus, the external social image can become an internal standard. The woman no longer needs to be directly ordered to perform every responsibility. She may discipline herself according to the ideal. This makes the image particularly difficult to challenge.

Cooke's work is valuable here because it encourages interest in the relationship between representation and women's agency (Cooke, 1988, 2001). Her research frequently examines women who negotiate imposed cultural identities and develop alternative, self-authored ways of representing themselves (Cooke, 2001, pp. 55–60). The challenge, therefore, is not simply to dismantle the image, but to create space for women to define themselves beyond a single ideal (Cooke, 2001, pp. 122–125).

Deconstructing the Image

Questioning the "Good Woman"

The first step toward transformation is to question the assumptions underlying the phrase "the good woman" (Cooke, 2001, pp. 88–92; Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 257–260).

* Who decides what constitutes a good woman?

* Why does motherhood require constant self-sacrifice?

* Why must domestic competence be considered primarily a female responsibility?

* Why must professional success coexist with full domestic responsibility?

These questions reveal that the image of the ideal woman is socially constructed, not naturally determined (Cooke, 2001; Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 18–23).

From Individual to Shared Responsibility

The second step is to move from individual to shared responsibility (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 268–275).

Instead of asking:

> "How can a woman manage everything?"

Society should ask:

> "How can responsibilities be distributed fairly?"

This shift changes the entire framework. The problem is no longer seen as a woman's inability to manage her time. It becomes a matter of social organization, institutional support, and structural gender equality (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 268–272).

Therefore:

* Housework should be recognized as shared work.

* Childcare should be understood as a shared responsibility.

* Emotional support should not be automatically feminized.

* Family planning and household management should not be solely the responsibility of women (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, pp. 271–275).

Towards Social Transformation

The ultimate argument of this paper is that dismantling the image of multitasking can contribute to social transformation. Social transformation requires more than simply encouraging women to conform to existing expectations. It requires changing the expectations themselves. Transformation can occur on several levels. Society must stop presenting the ability to do everything as the defining characteristic of successful womanhood.

*Women should be allowed to choose.

*They can choose a career.

*They can choose motherhood.

*They can choose both.

*They cannot choose either.

*They may prioritize one role during one phase of life and another later.

*Their worth should not be based on their ability to meet all expectations simultaneously.

Transforming Domestic Roles

Domestic responsibilities must be redistributed. Equality does not simply mean allowing women into the workplace. It also requires men and other family members to share domestic work equitably. Therefore, the goal should be: Not "women doing more," but "families sharing more."

Transforming Workplace Culture

Workplaces also play a role in challenging the notion of multitasking. Professional environments must recognize that workers have lives beyond work. Flexible arrangements, family-friendly policies, parental responsibilities, and equitable expectations can help reduce the disproportionate pressures placed on women. Media, literature, advertising, educational institutions, and social media all contribute significantly to constructing the image of femininity.

Transforming Cultural Narratives

If these spaces consistently portray the ideal woman as someone who does everything perfectly, they reproduce the same expectations. Alternative representations are therefore essential. Women should be represented not only as mothers, wives, workers, and caregivers, but also as complex individuals with diverse aspirations, limitations, desires, and choices.

From Critical Awareness to Social Change

The transformation proposed in this study begins with awareness. The first stage is recognizing the image. The second is questioning it. The third is identifying the inequalities hidden within it. The fourth is redistributing responsibility. The fifth is the creation of new social norms.

This can be visualized as follows:

Gender image

↓

Assimilation

↓

Anticipation of multitasking

↓

Second transformation

↓

Unequal burden

↓

Critical awareness

↓

Deconstruction

↓

Shared responsibility

↓

Social transformation

This model demonstrates that the solution does not lie in producing a more efficient, multitasking woman. It lies in producing a more equitable social structure.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in combining two perspectives that operate on different but complementary levels. Cooke's concept of image allows the study to investigate how representations of women are transformed into meaningful social constructs. Her research shows that women are often represented through simplistic categories and that women's voices can challenge these representations. Meanwhile, Hochschild's framework of second shifts shifts from representation to action. It shows that women who engage in paid work may still bear significant domestic responsibilities. The current study connects these levels by suggesting that image itself can contribute to the normalization of unequal work. If women are represented as naturally capable of managing multiple responsibilities, the unequal distribution of those responsibilities may become less apparent. This is why the language of praise can sometimes be problematic. Describing women as "superwomen" can celebrate resilience while simultaneously obscuring the structural conditions that make such resilience necessary. The crucial task, therefore, is to distinguish between acknowledging women's capabilities and the social dependence on women's unpaid labor. The argument does not call for a rejection of women's professional achievements or their ability to manage different aspects of life. Rather, it calls for a shift in the social meaning associated with those abilities. Women should not have to demonstrate exceptional endurance to be considered successful.

FINDINGS

Based on the theoretical analysis, the study identifies several key findings.

First, the image of the multitasking woman is a contemporary form of gender representation. It differs from older images of women but can still reproduce gender expectations.

Second, the image appears empowering because it celebrates women's strength, competence, and independence. However, it can become restrictive when these qualities are transformed into obligations.

Third, Hochschild's second shift reveals the material dimension of this image. Women's participation in paid work does not necessarily negate their responsibility for housework and caregiving.

Fourth, celebrating multitasking can mask the unequal distribution of labor. Instead of questioning why women take on multiple responsibilities, society may simply admire their ability to do so.

Fifth, genuine empowerment requires distinguishing between choice and expectation. Women should have the freedom to multitask when they choose, but they should not be socially forced to perform multiple roles as proof of their worth.

Finally, social transformation requires a shift from women's individual adaptation to a structural redistribution of responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The image of the multitasking woman represents a significant paradox in contemporary gender relations. On the surface, it appears to represent women's liberation from traditional constraints. Women are increasingly encouraged to study, work, achieve professional success, participate in public life, raise children, maintain the family, and provide for their households. However, celebrating this capacity can mask persistent inequalities: women may be expected to acquire new responsibilities without relinquishing old ones. Through Miriam Cooke's concept of image, this paper addresses the multitasking woman as a socially constructed image, not an inescapable reality. Cooke's grant highlights the importance of examining how women are represented and how these representations can be challenged and transformed. Through Hochschild's concept of the second shift, the

study demonstrates how the ideal of the working woman can coexist with continued domestic responsibility. The central conclusion, therefore, is that the problem does not lie in multitasking itself. The problem is the gender expectation that women must multitask. Women should not prove their worth through exhaustion. They should not be praised for taking on responsibilities that society could distribute more equitably. Nor should they be expected to become "superwomen" simply because social structures have failed to redistribute labor. The desired transformation, therefore, is a movement: from the ideal woman to the independent woman; from mandatory multitasking to individual choice; from unequal responsibility to shared responsibility; and from celebrating women's endurance to transforming the structures that demand such endurance. Thus, the true measure of women's empowerment should not be the amount of responsibility a woman can shoulder, but whether she has the freedom, recognition, support, and social equality necessary to determine the responsibilities she is willing to undertake.

Consequently, dismantling the myth of the multitasking woman is not an argument against women's strength. It is an argument for a society where women's strength is no longer exploited as a justification for unequal responsibility. True social transformation will occur when the question shifts from "How can a woman manage everything?" to "How can society share responsibility fairly?"

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