ISSN 1812-0512 (Print) 2790-346X (online)

Wasit Journal for Human Sciences

Available online at: https://wjfh.uowasit.edu.iq

OPEN ACCESS

Women's Objectification through Media and Fashion Apparatuses: An Althusserian Reading of Interpellation in Barbara Bourland's I'll Eat When I'm Dead

Taimaa Shaker Mahmoud[1], Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed[2]

College of Education for Women/ Tikrit University, Iraq

***Correspondence**:
Taimaa.Mahmood155@st.tu.edu.iq
Lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq

Received: 10 **August** 2025
Accepted: 31 **August** 2025
Published: 01 November 2025

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1262

Cite:
Mahmoud , T. S., & Rasheed , L. A. . (n.d.). Women's Objectification through Media and Fashion Apparatuses: An Althusserian Reading of Interpellation in Barbara Bourland's I'll Eat When I'm Dead. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 21(4).
https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1262

ABSTRACT

The objectification of women remains a global issue in media and advertisements, where the female body is reduced to a tool for visual pleasure and consumer manipulation. When people judge women by how they look, many accept that and try to follow by changing themselves physically. This research examines Barbara Bourland's I'll Eat When I'm Dead (2017) to identify the ideological mechanisms by which media and fashion contribute to women's objectification, using Althusser's interpellation as a framework. The study investigates how female characters are positioned and constructed as ideological subjects, particularly concerning beauty standards, consumer culture, and the male gaze. The analysis reveals how dominant ideological structures, disseminated through visual imagery and narrative discourse, hail women into objectified positions that serve patriarchal and capitalist interests. Furthermore, the analysis highlights how media and fashion operate as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that reinforce gender expectations, limit female autonomy, and sustain systemic inequality.

Keywords: Women's objectification, Althusserian interpellation, capitalist ideology, media and fashion (ISA), Barbara Bourland's I'll Eat When I'm Dead

تشييء المرأة من خلال اجهزه وسائل الاعلام والموضة: قراءة التوسيرية للاستدعاء في رواية سأكل عندما اموت لبربارا بورلاند

تيماء شاكر محمود ، أ.د. لمياء أحمد رشيد
كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة تكريت

المُستخلص

لا يزال تشييء المرأة قضية عالمية في وسائل الإعلام والإعلانات، إذ يُختزل جسد الأنثى في أداة للمتعة البصرية والتلاعب بالمستهلك. وعندما يحكم الناس على النساء عن طريق مظهرهن، يقبل كثيرون ذلك، ويحاولون اتباعه بتغيير أنفسهم جسديًا. يتناول هذا البحث رواية باربرا بورلاند "سآكل عندما أموت" (2017) لتحديد الآليات الأيديولوجية التي تسهم فيها وسائل الإعلام والموضة في تشييء النساء، باستخدام استجواب ألتوسير كإطار. وتبحث الدراسة في كيفية وضع الشخصيات النسائية وبنائها كموضوعات أيديولوجية، ولا سيما فيما يتعلق بمعايير الجمال وثقافة المستهلك ونظرة الذكور. يكشف التحليل كيف أن الهياكل الأيديولوجية المهيمنة المنتشرة في الصور المرئية والخطاب السردي، تدفع النساء إلى مواقف تشييئية تخدم المصالح الأبوية والرأسمالية. علاوة على ذلك، يسلط التحليل الضوء على كيفية عمل وسائل الإعلام والموضة كأجهزة دولة أيديولوجية تعزز التوقعات الجندرية، وتحد من استقلالية المرأة، وتحافظ على عدم المساواة الممنهجة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تشييء المرأة، الاستدعاء الألتوسيري، الأيديولوجية الرأسمالية، الإعلام والموضة ((ISA، رواية باربرا بورلاند سآكل عندما أموت

1.1 Introduction

Louis Pierre Althusser (1918–1990) a prominent French Marxist thinker widely recognized for reshaping modern literary and ideological theory. Concerned that Marx's ideas had been misinterpreted over time, Althusser sought to defend and revitalize Marxist traditions against theoretical and political threats (Ferretter, 2006). Drawing on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories, he reconceptualized ideology from a Marxist standpoint, arguing that Marx had only initiated a deeper inquiry into its function (Savova, 2019). Within Marxist criticism, ideology is often understood in two key ways: first, as a form of "false consciousness" that obscures reality, and second, as a set of embodied practices that individuals enact daily. This second perspective, emphasized by Althusser, positions ideology not merely as illusion but as a lived material reality that shapes human behavior and sustains the dominant worldview (Venturin, 2013).

However, rethinking the idea of ideology, it was Althusser's contribution that sparked a renewed interest in Marxist theory. In his early work, *For Marx* (2005), originally published in 1965, he initially described ideology as a "system of representation" (p. 231) governed by specific rules to support political ends. This early view saw ideology as a matter of the unconscious, affecting all social classes, including the dominant class. Later, in his work *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* in 1970, Althusser revised his views, suggesting that ideology is not only unavoidable, but

also becomes visible through people's actual practices and daily routine (Lee, 2020). According to Althusser, the primary function of ideology is "to reproduce the social relations of production that are necessary to the material existence of any social formation or any mode of production" (Hall, 1985, p. 98).

The idea of ideology in Althusser's thought suggests that the ruling class sustains its dominance by disseminating its ideas through cultural institutions such as education, media, religion, and the family. Althusser's work built on Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and influenced cultural materialists in recognizing the material basis of cultural practices. Althusser's influential essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971), solidified his reputation. In it, he contends that ideology is central to how individuals perceive reality and how political systems shape subjectivity (Keshavarz & Abjadian, 2011). Althusser, like many Marxists, did not use the term "ideology" in the conventional English sense. Ideology, generally speaking, refers to a deliberate and conscious set of political ideas but for Althusser, ideology has another meaning: "it refers to an unconscious set of beliefs and assumptions, our imaginary relation to real conditions, especially to real conditions that may not match what we imagine" (Parker, 2019, p. 283). According to Althusser, we cannot describe our ideologies since they are unconscious, as we misrecognize the reality around us, leading us to misunderstand what makes us behave the way we do (Parker, 2019).

In his essay, Althusser (1971) claims that "ideology has a material existence" (p. 165), emphasizing that ideas and representations that constitute ideology do not have an ideal or spiritual existence; instead, they are grounded in material practices and structures. According to Ferreter (2006), Althusser conceptualizes the state apparatus as consisting of two sets of institutions that intersect yet maintain separate functions. The first is the "Repressive State Apparatus" (RSA), which includes institutions such as "the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, and the prisons," which according to Althusser, "functions by violence — at least ultimately" (Althusser, 1971, pp. 142-143). The second is the "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA), which includes institutions like education, religion, family, and communication that serve to reproduce state ideology and maintain the existing power structure. As a key component of the communication ISA, the media significantly influences people's consciousness by reinforcing the dominant ideology. Althusser (1971) argues that ISA works by spreading values and ideas in the ruling class's interests, creating social unity and normalizing certain ideologies. Through the media, for instance, the state can manipulate its people easily through the ongoing reproduction of everyday life. For example, any involvement of the state, whether explicit or implicit, in the publication of news or events in newspapers and magazines can manipulate or change society's perception of the news or events,

leading to systematic and automatic ideological manipulation over time (Sevgi & Ozgokceler, 2016).

The concept of interpellation is the core of Althusser's theory, which he defines as the process by which ideology transforms individuals into subjects. As he explains, “Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals, or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing” (Althusser, 1971, p. 174). Althusser used the concept of interpellation to explain how the ideological system maintains its continuity. Interpellation, as Backer (2018) clarifies, is "a concrete moment of ideological reproduction" in which individuals "become a subject of that ideology" and follow its principles "without any force compelling them" (p. 2). This idea of “interpellation,” which literally means “calling”, explains how the ideological system “calls” or “hails” us, much like someone who greets us with “hello!” When we respond to this call, we become subjects of interpellation, just as individuals are subjected to the government or legal authority (Parker, 2019).

This process is central to how individuals are born into and shaped by certain ideologies. Interpellation is not merely an external imposition, but it becomes an essential part of an individual’s identity, as ideology itself is what constitutes individuals as subjects. Althusser (1971) asserts, “Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects,” meaning that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects…there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject” (p. 170). Through this perspective, Althusser demonstrates how ideas enter our minds and affect our lives, to the point that cultural ideas are so deeply embedded in our thinking that we mistakenly believe they are our own. In this case, interpellation is a process through which we encounter our culture’s principles and accept them (Septianingish & Wahyuni, 2015).

An example given by Althusser to demonstrate the process of interpellation, in which a person walks on the street, when suddenly a policeman screams, 'Hey, you there! The person responds almost automatically by turning around. This unthinking reaction, as well as the ambiguous way the police officer calls out, exemplifies how external factors place people in certain roles or subject positions (Althusser, 1971). Interpellation, as explained by Althusser (1971), is a process through which individuals are hailed by ideology, shaping them as subjects who unconsciously embrace dominant social norms. He explains, “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects,” which means that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects; this can be understood as “individuals are more or less subject” (p. 176). This concept is further illustrated through social practices that occur in everyday settings. For example, Kukla (2018) shows how interpellation functions in everyday social practices. For instance, when a teacher calls a student’s

name during attendance, the student must recognize the hail and respond by raising their hand and calling back "here," allowing them to enact and embody their identity as a student. This process not only acknowledges the teacher's authority but also reinforces the student's social identity through repeated, ritualized interactions.

In media contexts, interpellation works similarly but often intersects with the concept of objectification. Through media and advertisements, individuals do not merely hail into ideological roles; rather, they often construct these roles around patriarchal traditions. For instance, when an ad in a magazine asks, "Are you starting to worry about wrinkles?" Such a question interpellates women by addressing them immediately, placing them as subjects who should be concerned about their appearance, and understanding that they are the ones the advertisement calls. This either evokes or strengthens their worries about wrinkles or compels them to assert themselves as those who, based on their identity, might be expected to worry about such things (Kukla, 2018). This process aligns with objectification, which feminist scholars such as Nussbaum (1995) and Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) describe as the reduction of individuals, especially women, to their physical attributes or used to serve others' purposes. Such ads make women pay too much attention to their appearances, reinforcing social expectations and perpetuating the ideology of patriarchy.

As Kukla (2018) notes, ideology has a naturalizing effect that conceals the contingent, historical, and constructed nature of social relations, making them appear as inevitable features of reality. For instance, money has value because we treat it as inherently valuable. However, if society collectively stopped treating it as having value, its value would immediately vanish. This logic similarly applies to advertisements that present predetermined choices, like beauty products or anti-aging creams, as necessities for women, which support consumerism within gendered objectification. This process connects objectification and interpellation, making them work together to keep and reproduce ideological systems. This phenomenon extends to larger ideological systems, such as capitalism and patriarchy, which continue by embedding their norms into the behaviors of those who accept these norms as natural realities, although they are consciously aware of their constructed nature.

Building on this, Parker (2019) emphasizes an individual's interpellation by consumerism, providing an example of an advertisement for a new product that prompts us to consider which new phone, game, or shoes we desire, giving the illusion that we are making our own decisions and expressing our individuality. However, this process reveals how people are interpellated or hailed into accepting the ideological assumption driving consumer culture. In fact, we do not respond by saying, "Wait, I do not want a phone or a new game, shoes, etc." Furthermore, we do not say that the system that deceives us into believing we need such products results in an economic system that

divides wealth and political authority unfairly and oppressively. By unconsciously accepting these premises, individuals fail to challenge the larger structural injustices perpetuated by such practices. The ideology of consumerism operates by presenting predetermined options as expressions of individuality, thereby concealing conformity and passive submission to the dominant economic system.

Althusser's interpellation explains how people are unconsciously obliged to accept and reproduce dominant ideologies. Interpellation influences identities and behaviors, whether in consumerism, educational, and personal contexts, reinforcing the ideological system that normalizes and sustains authority.

Althusser's theory of interpellation has found extensive application in political and cultural theory, its use in literature, particularly in the context of advertisements and media portrayals of women, remains limited. However, a few notable studies have explored interpellation in literature, where there is a notable study by Sadiq and Shafi (2023), titled "Louis Althusser's Theory of Interpellation in *The Merchant of Venice*", in which they apply Althusser's concept of interpellation to Shakespeare's dramatic text, emphasizing how language and ideology intersect to construct subjectivity. Their analysis demonstrates how individuals are ideologically positioned through discourse, particularly highlighting the marginalization of Shylock as the "Other" within a Christian-dominated social structure. The study underscores how dominant ideologies are internalized through both Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses (RSAs and ISAs), manifesting in capitalist, racist, and patriarchal systems that produce compliance and subordination.

In their 2018 article "*Subjectivity and Ideological Interpellation: An Althusserian Reading of Bozorg Alavi's Her Eyes,"* Sadjadi and Ahmadirad conduct a critical analysis of the Persian realist novel *Her Eyes* (1952) by Bozorg Alavi using Althusser's concepts of ideology, interpellation, and the subject/Subject model. The study reveals how the socialist values of the Tudeh Party ideologically shape the novel's protagonist, Master Makan, and other characters. By applying Althusser's theory, the researchers demonstrate how individuals are unconsciously hailed by dominant ideological forces, resulting in the construction of the subject as a product of ideology rather than an autonomous agent. The study argues that, while the characters perceive themselves as free, their identities and actions are governed by larger ideological structures.

Although the previous studies have employed Althusser's concept of interpellation to examine different ideological structures in literature, they differ significantly from this research in terms of scope and focus. These studies have primarily focused on interpellation in terms of general ideological control, gender roles, or the psychological aspects of the characters, without explicitly

addressing the issue of objectification of women as a subject through the media and advertising. This research applies the theory of interpellation to analyze how contemporary selected novels portray women as objects influenced by media ideologies, particularly in relation to standards of beauty, consumption, and the male gaze.

Concerning the previous studies about Bourland's *I'll Eat When I'm Dead,* no studies are available for it as it remains relatively underexplored in academic discourse. Although the novel addresses essential issues, including the fashion and media industries, as well as its keen portrayal of women's objectification through consumer culture and beauty standards, no significant scholarly studies have been published to investigate it. This lack of critical engagement creates a considerable gap in literary analysis; thus, *I'll Eat When I'm Dead* is selected in this study to address this gap and contribute to the ongoing academic discussion about women's objectification in media and advertisements, particularly through the lens of Althusserian interpellation.

1.2 The Statement of the Problem

In today's technologically advanced world, media and advertisements have a profound influence on how individuals think, particularly regarding the perception of women and their self-image. Through the media's platforms, women are hailed into roles that contribute to their objectification, in which they are often compelled to accept and internalize. This objectification goes beyond mere representation; it serves as a means of ideological control. According to Althusser's concept of interpellation, women are assigned subjective roles that align with prevailing ideological norms. *I'll Eat When I'm Dead* depicts female characters who are hailed by media and advertising ideologies that promote unattainable beauty standards, which in turn lead to their objectification and shape their identities within a patriarchal capitalist system.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The current research aims to examine the objectification of women in media and advertisements as portrayed in the selected novel, through the theoretical lens of Althusser's interpellation. It seeks to investigate how media and advertisements function as ideological state apparatuses, serving as tools of interpellation that hail women to adopt specific rules and identities that support their objectification and render them commodities for the male gaze. To achieve the aims, the research is going to follow these objectives:

1-To explain the meaning of women's objectification as a concept and as a theme in literary context.
2- To investigate the role of media and advertisements in interpellating women as objects for the male gaze through adapting Althusser's theory of Marxism, particularly his concepts of interpellation and ideology.
3- To examine how women accept this objectification and become commodities to please men and how, in some cases, they resist such objectification and reject the dominant ideological system in the selected contemporary novel.

1.4 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1- What does women's objectification mean, and how is it represented as a literary theme in *I'll Eat When I'm Dead?*

2- How do media and advertisements function as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) to interpellate women as objects for the male gaze?

3- How do the female characters in the selected novel internalize and accept their objectification and turn themselves into commodities to satisfy patriarchal and capitalist interests, and how do they subvert this objectification?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its theoretical and literary engagement of Althusser's concept of interpellation to analyze the objectification of women in contemporary media and advertising. Through the analysis of *I'll Eat When I'm Dead*, the study highlights how female characters are hailed and positioned as subjects within the ideological state apparatuses, especially in the contexts of media and culture. The study contributes to feminist literary criticism by revealing how literature reflects and critiques the internalization of beauty norms, body image pressures, and the commodification of women's identities in the selected text.

1.6 Starving to Be Feminine: Interpellation and Ideological Hegemony in Barbara Bourland's *I'll Eat When I'm Dead*

Barbara Bourland is an American novelist known for her severe critiques of contemporary culture, focusing particularly on themes of femininity, media, and power structures. Her literary

works are significantly influenced by her experiences in the media industry, which provide genuine insights into the realms she explores. Furthermore, Bourland expresses her admiration and influence for twentieth-century writers known for their sophisticated and masterful use of language, ranging from the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop to the dark, intense prose of Bret Easton Ellis (Bourland, 2017).

Her novel*, I'll Eat When I'm Dead,* is a darkly satirical, anti-capitalist high-wire act disguised as fluffy women's fiction published in 2017. The novel shows the underlying anxiety of the fashion and media industries, particularly their obsession with appearances, thinness, and idealized femininity. Set in the sleek offices of a fictional fashion magazine in New York City, the novel follows Cat Ono, a stylish and ambitious editor who becomes embroiled in the suspicious death of her coworker. Beneath its charming surface, the novel criticizes the intense pressures placed on women to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and the inescapable commercial culture that drives these expectations. Throughout the novel, Bourland navigates the events between New York and Paris, two global centers of fashion where women are openly objectified. In particular, she sets much of the narrative within fashion magazines and luxury hotels, spaces that host parties filled with women obsessed with beauty, thinness, and style. These settings are not chosen randomly; rather, Bourland deliberately places her characters in such environments to highlight how modern capitalist cities use women as tools for profit. Bourland begins the novel with a satirical portrayal of a group of women who work at Cooper House, the last major magazine publisher in New York, as they arrive at their workplace in elegant attire, with beautiful, slim bodies, as if invisible ideological forces drive them.

Every weekday morning…a peerless crop of women—frames poised, behavior polished, networks connected, and bodies generally buffed to a high sheen—were herded by the cattle prod of their own ambition to one particular building…to work at Cooper House, the only remaining major magazine publisher in New York (Bourland, 2017, p. 5).

These women are the product of a culture that trains them to refine and shape themselves in a consumer form of beauty and professionalism, suited to places like magazines. They seem to be already interpellated subjects, called into existence by ideological structures, especially the ideology of success, beauty, and ambition within the capitalist and media system. This represents Althusser's interpellation, which describes how ideology shapes individuals as subjects even before they become aware of it. Luke Ferreter explains the influence of ideology on individuals:

Ideology addresses me, as it were, before I am even born, as I grow up and throughout my life, as an 'I', as a subject, as a site of identity, thought and action. This is what Althusser means by the term 'interpellation': ideology calls me into being as a subject, as if it were calling me by name in the street. It causes me to believe that I am a subject, although in the reality of the capitalist mode of

production (Ferretter, 2006, p. 89).

Essentially, this means that ideology influences individuals from birth and throughout life, affecting their identities and leading them to believe they are free, unique, and independent thinkers. However, this perception of individualism is merely an illusion, as the capitalist system shapes people and guides their roles and behaviors by controlling ideological structures. Bourland's metaphorical statement, "herded by the cattle prod of their ambition to one particular building" (Bourland, 2017, p. 5), means that their desires are not their own, but are produced and manipulated by the dominant ideology.

Among these women, there is a 28-year-old girl named Bess Bonner, an editor in *RAGE* magazine, whose appearance reflects the beauty enforced by the fashion industry. "The only embellishment Bess had on her face was a thick set of individually applied mink lashes that cost $900 per application, giving her the look of a soft-focus Twiggy" (Bourland, 2017, p. 9). This reflects the commodification of femininity, where girls like Bess pay a high price to buy products that make them look pretty to suit the workplace. According to Duesterhaus et al. (2011), "This high price of femininity is fueled by the cultural expectation that women appear attractive and women's own desires to do so" (p. 15), economically speaking, in doing so, this is irrational behavior.

The story then shifts to Catherine (Cat) Ono, a senior editor at *RAGE*. The name "Cat" carries symbolic meaning connected to the objectification of women and Althusser's concept of interpellation. Culturally, the cat is a symbol often associated with stereotypical traits of femininity, such as beauty, grace, and mystery, which are frequently exploited in media and advertisements to construct and sell an ideal image of women. The use of the animal name "Cat" in the novel symbolizes a reduction of the character's identity to a set of superficial, objectified traits that subject women to external expectations. Moreover, the shift from full name "Catherine" to the shortened "Cat" indicates a partial loss of the individual self, referring to Althusser's idea of misrecognition, where individuals are identified with ideological roles imposed on them and think that they stem from themselves.

At the office, Cat is joined by Lou, a wealthy socialite brought not for her editorial abilities but for her significance to the magazine's visual brand, "because of her experience as a subject in magazines, not as a writer or an editor" (Bourland, 2017, p. 15). Lou's employment prioritizes the image over the essence, illustrating how the fashion industry interpellates women into roles where appearance is capital, and leading to their objectification as subjects in magazines, rather than for their voices and contributions. This means the "Objectification of professional women decreases humanness, agency, competence, morality, and mind attribution… in addition, women are rated as less intelligent after people view them with more of their body showing relative to their face"

(Johnson et al., 2018, p. 7). This means they are no longer seen for their inner qualities or intellect, but for their visual impact on the brand. That is why Lou hired not for her thought leadership but for her visual appeal, indicating that the female professional body is a surface to be viewed rather than a mind to be heard.

Later, Cat receives a call from the building's lobby: "There's a detective here from the NYPD. He'd like to speak with you as soon as possible. May we send him up?" (Bourland, 2017, p. 24). This marks the beginning of the investigations led by Detective Hutton, who begins the investigation into Hillary Whitney's surprising death, Hillary's body is eventually discovered in windowless closet, "dead for at least eight hours, and Cooper's attorneys had swarmed the room where her body lay sprawled on the floor in an expensive-looking dress" (Bourland, 2017, p. 26). Her death goes unnoticed until her body grows cold and her big green eyes remain open, staring at the door. This setting becomes symbolic: the closet symbolizes the isolation Hillary experienced in life; both physically and emotionally, where she dies in loneliness and silence. Bourland, through Hutton's critical observation, satirizes the oppressive work culture at *RAGE*: "What kinds of workplaces let employees lock themselves in closets for half-days and routinely kept interns until near midnight, so paralyzed by the fear of being fired that they wouldn't disturb their coworkers for a perceived emergency?"(Bourland, 2017, p. 26). This criticism emphasizes the psychological impact imposed by these environments, especially on women, turning them into mere replaceable, silent things within the image-obsessed capitalist media mechanism.

In his interview with Cat, Hutton asked whether she had noticed anything strange about Hillary before her death, and she responded that Hillary had recently "become overly concerned about her appearance in every possible way" (Bourland, 2017, p. 34). Detective Hutton later explained that the coroner found signs of lasting damage that cause eating disorders. "Ms. Ono, I appreciate that you work in an environment where excessive thinness is the norm. Nevertheless, there is absolutely no question that Hillary Whitney suffered from a physically devastating eating disorder that badly damaged her heart" (Bourland, 2017, p. 35). Hutton's statement highlights how deeply women working in the magazine have internalized dominant beauty ideology, as they must be slim to work in the magazine, even though this causes side effects on their mental and physical health. This act exemplifies interpellation, whereby the beauty ideology propagated by the media and reinforced by the fashion industry hails women as subjects who must conform to artificial beauty standards. Hillary, like other women in the magazine, was interpellated to believe that her value was directly related to her thinness, which made her internalize these standards to the point of destroying herself.

As an advertising strategy aimed at interpellating women into consumerist ideology, Vittoria's

shop was filled with unregulated, label-free products, with names such as “Happiness,” “Clarity,” “Long hair growth,” “Nice hair texture,” “Strong nails,” “Fertility,” and, most sensationally, “Bigger breasts”(Bourland, 2017, p. 89). Attracted by these labels, Cat is hailed into this ideology and chooses to use the products, telling Vittoria she has a date and wants to be beautiful. In response, Vittoria becomes excited, preparing Cat with various products, massaging her, brushing her hair, and applying serums and lotions. By the end of the makeover process, Vittoria gave Cat a collection of the products as a free gift to share with other girls. This scene shows how the capitalist systems use the objectified image of women to market products, turning women into consumers and agents of ideological reproduction. Later, during her meeting with Hutton, Cat explained what happened to her while he admired her beauty. Surprised by this business strategy, Hutton examined the products and suspected that the beauty items may be drug-laced.

At that time, Detective Hutton had uncovered alarming findings about Bedford Organics’ products, which contained dangerous drugs; thus, he asked Cat to come immediately to the precinct to make an official statement. At the police precinct, Cat was wearing a bold, eye-catching dress, which drew Hutton’s attention and led to a sexual relationship between them. This moment reflects the mechanism of the male gaze, where Cat is not seen as a reliable witness, but as a sexual tool, and her value is reduced to her appearance. More importantly, this act also demonstrates Althusserian interpellation, in which Cat is not hailed for her identity or ability to act, but instead as a body to be used, first sexually, then strategically, within an institutional framework. Hutton's command, “We need you to buy more drugs” (Bourland, 2017, p. 144), repositions her not as an independent individual but as a tool modeled by ideological expectations associated with sex and appearance.

As a part of the investigation operation, undercover female officers will attend a meeting that Cat arranges with Vittoria. However, when Cat and Bess notice that the officers are dressed plainly and inappropriately for the fashion-conscious influencer scene, they insist, “We should dress them” (Bourland, 2017, p. 147) and give them complete makeovers to fit in. This transformation is not just superficial, but, as explained by Althusser (1971), it is an ideological act in which ideology recruit’s individuals as subjects by hailing them into roles that suit the dominant social norms. Here, it can be seen that the officers are hailed into the subject position of fashionable, beautifully pleasing women conforming to the visual expectations of the media. Through this ideological process, these women are hailed to occupy a specific subject position, where their value is measured by the extent to which they are visually compatible with the aesthetic standards imposed by the capitalist media. This interpellation leads directly to their objectification, where they become a tool used for a specific purpose (Nussbaum, 1995).

Unfortunately, while doing their mission, the police arrested Cat and Bess. To defend them, Sigrid visited Hutton, accusing him of ruining their lives. She explains the social and professional implications of arresting women, especially in New York's competitive environment, as she says:

This is a public shaming. It's different for women. If you're not married and you fuck up like this—hell, even if you are married, let's face it, in this day and age, your husband can still just leave you with absolutely no consequences; someone else will climb right back on in a heartbeat—you'll never be someone that somebody wants to be with. New York is so competitive, for everything. Who's going to hire two washed-up party girls? Who's going to take them home for Thanksgiving? Nobody. Nobody (Bourland, 2017, p. 165).

In her speech, Sigrid expresses the harsh social judgment imposed on women who deviated from prescribed norms. Her statement, "This is a public shaming. It is different for women," illustrates the gendered double standard embedded in cultural ideology that maintains social and professional value. As noted by Melissa. E. Dichter (2013), even when women are victims, their arrests may "compromise their safety and overall well-being" (p. 84) and lead to "stigmatization and discrimination, spoiling the individual's identity" (p. 82). Like other women, Sigrid has been hailed into a specific gendered role, where women must be desirable, flawless, and respectable. Furthermore, the statement "you'll never be someone that somebody wants to be with" is an example of how women are interpellated to internalize narrow, socially constructed ideals of femininity, in which women must be desirable, pure, marriageable, and socially appealing. Dichter (2013) emphasizes that arrest may cause "a woman is likely to face difficulty maintaining or gaining employment, particularly in industries or jobs dominated by women" (p. 85), leading to a loss of economic independence. Furthermore, Sigrid claims, "someone else will climb right back on in a heartbeat," as if women are seen as replaceable commodities in both emotional and professional realms.

The media and advertisements employ numerous cheap and manipulative techniques to capture the attention of young girls and encourage them to purchase the goods promoted by capitalist forces. One of the most prominent of these techniques is the use of women's bodies, often achieved by dressing them in scandalous clothing that reduces them to commodities on display. This becomes evident in the case of Callie, who gains recognition as a model associated with *RAGE* and securing several jobs, including an "inner beauty" campaign with Raven, a cosmetics brand damaged by a recent scandal. In the advertisement, Callie presents herself in a way that highlights her objectification, "she wore only a sequined bikini bottom from his spring collection as she took tiny bites of an oversized ice-cream sandwich that melted and dripped down onto her body" (Bourland, 2017, p. 223). In this scene, Callie's portrayal embodies how ideology interpellates women to see

themselves primarily as objects of consumption, both visually and commercially. Through her semi-nude performance, Callie unconsciously represents the capitalist ideal that connects feminine value with sexual representation, while serving the interests of the beauty industry under the guise of empowerment. According to Althusser (1971), "ideological state apparatuses…function massively and predominantly by ideology" (p. 146). In other words, the media, advertising, and fashion industries control individuals through ideology rather than force, influencing how people think, behave, and view themselves by disseminating capitalist-driven ideas. According to Althusser's concept of interpellation, the ideological apparatus of media and advertising hails Callie to recognize herself as a subject, whose value lies in her attractiveness and marketability, thus ensuring the continued reproduction of the capitalist system.

Callie's exploitation continues to be portrayed during a photo shoot edited by Lou, designing her as the future goddess of the Earth, in which she performs a series of dramatic and symbolic movements. She breaks glass in a museum diorama, rides zoo animals, and engages with crowds. The decisive moment occurs at Lincoln Center, where Callie, dressed in a daring leather bikini paired with a linen cape, throws cellphones on fire, and encourages the crowd to discard their digital and fashion shackles. "People of Earth!" she yelled. "Free yourselves! Throw your phones on this fire!" (Bourland, 2017, p. 233). By using Callie, Bourland presents scathing criticism and raises awareness about how the media and fashion exploit women, urging them to resist the media's imposed restrictions and reclaim their freedom. A few moments later, many women follow Callie: "I don't need it anymore either," the editor said. "I'm so goddamn sick of Fashion Week." "Me too," said another woman in a black cocktail dress. She handed her tablet to Callie while the second phone exploded. (Bourland, 2017, p. 233). This act marks a decisive moment of resistance, which, in the Althusserian sense, signifies that these women, who have been interpellated to accept the ideology promoted by the media, begin to reject the values imposed by ideological expectations. In this context, "women's resistance often took the form of emotional resilience, and symbolic act of independence. They opposed societal expectations not through overt activism but by enduring with strength, and refusal to conform to unjust roles" (Asaad, 2025, p. 1176).

Although signs of resistance are beginning to appear, the narrative also continues to reveal the tragic consequences of ideological submission, as seen in Callie's personal experience. Thereafter, Cat receives an invitation from Lou for a party at her penthouse, where she finds a massive crowd of models and fashionable guests. She sees that Callie, the plus-sized model, was there, where she goes to the balcony, discreetly inhaling an unknown substance from a plastic bag. Moments later, Callie starts choking; Cat rushes to help, hides the drug bag in her jacket, and drives Callie into a private

room. After Callie loses consciousness, Cat tries "to force air out of her throat in a Heimlich maneuver, but the girdle beneath Callie's dress was too tight; it wasn't possible to exert the needed force through the undergarment" (Bourland, 2017, p. 238). What happened to Callie is more than a physical obstruction; it symbolically represents the oppressive social pressure concerning women's appearance, which can threaten their lives. The girdle becomes a literal constraint on her ability to breathe, save herself, and be saved. Naomi Wolf, in *The Beauty Myth* discussed how "It used to be that being a woman in the United States meant that…you encased your flesh in rigid plastic casing that made it difficult to breathe and difficult to move, but you weren't supposed to notice that" (Wolf, 2002, p. 214). From an Althusserian perspective, the girdle represents a material expression of ideology, not simply a set of ideas, but one that exists in practices and rituals. Thus, putting on tight underwear to conform to beauty standards is a key part of an ideological system that compels women to prioritize their physical appearance, frequently sacrificing their health and independence in the process.

The pressure Cat faces in her professional environment, where she had been assigned to take over a fashion shoot originally proposed by Hillary, titled Bridle: The Exquisite Ties That Bind, exacerbates this symbolic gesture. "The shoot intended to showcase the nation's ten best-selling mass-produced wedding gowns" (Bourland, 2017, p. 252). It became essential not only for the December edition of *RAGE* magazine but also for establishing the magazine as a frontrunner in ethical fashion. However, instead of empowering her, the shoot intensifies Cat's sense of objectification, as she does not see her body as a means for life or expression, but as a product that must be improved and displayed. "But anxiety wasn't the only thing that kept her from eating. Cat was now so focused on the way she fit into clothes that she'd become obsessed with herself, unable to daydream about anything except the hollows between her bones" (Bourland, 2017, p. 255). Her body thus becomes a commodity shaped by consumerist logic, while the media functions as an ideological state apparatus that interpellates her into a subject who internalizes and reproduces the dominant ideology of thinness and perfection.

Cat becomes a product or tool used to suit the shoot, serving the magazine's reputation and earning money. Bibi, the makeup artist, transformed her by using new techniques that made her look flawless without obvious makeup, as she accepted her commodification, and even more, she feels blessed, comparing her look with the look of Marie Antoinette and French beauty ideals:

Cat was unceremoniously squeezed into a hateful rubber bodice, to lift what was left of her breasts and smooth over the rocky vertebrae of her back, the sharp angles of her hipbones. After that she was stitched into an astonishingly tight dove-gray suede dress that ended mid-calf,…As Cat stared into

the gilded mirror…, she wanted to laugh at the irony of it all: I'm completely fucking immobilized, a dictator's mistress, tits pouring out of my dress, everything I always hated (Bourland, 2017, p. 270).

This quote blatantly reveals the violent objectification and interpellation of women through the media mechanisms and the fashion industry, which is closely in line with the theory of ideological interpellation. The forced transformation of Cat shows how ideology not only works on the mind but also materially incarnates on the body. The disguised rubber corset and the tight dress reshape her body to match an image dictated by prevailing capitalist aesthetic standards, commodifying and tempting the female body to be a material for consumption. When Cat stares at her reflection and realizes herself as a "dictator's mistress," she goes through a moment of misrecognition, where she is in the position of the self she hates but is ideologically hailed into. This moment captures how the media and advertising industries, as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), not only promote repressive aesthetic norms but also materially impose them, turning women into static subjects known through the external gaze, not through their internal will.

Because of their narrow clothes and the girdles, they wear underneath, the women leave the party without eating. The conversation between Bess and Cat shows this satirical situation "Shit," Bess exclaimed. "I don't know if there will actually be food at this dinner. Do you want to eat before we go?" "I'll eat when I'm dead," Cat said dismissively. "Let's just get this over with" (Bourland, 2017, p. 271). Bourland skillfully integrated the novel's title "*I'll Eat When I'm Dead*" through Cat's statements "I'll eat when I'm dead" to expose the extreme introspection of repressive beauty standards among women. The women's debate reveals their physical discomfort from wearing tight clothes and straps, and how even basic needs, such as eating, are subject to the perfect look. Through her satirical statement, Cat not only reflects her personal submission but also mocks a bigger social problem in which women are obliged to accept self-denial and physical discipline as a necessity of social acceptability.

Women cannot escape objectification by the media, even in death, and this is what happened to Callie, whose death story is manipulated by RAGE magazine, where the publication distorts reality by mixing real events with a sensationalized tabloid narrative. As McRobbie argues, women are "being disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism" (as cited in Butler, 209, p. 950). This critical view applies directly to Callie's story, which becomes a prime example of this disempowerment masked as a feminist tribute. The article attributes Callie's death to her emotional breakdown, worsened by her relationship with Hutton, and concludes with a feminist message about self-love and sisterhood:

The world would have already forgotten Callie Court—if it wasn't for RAGE's bravery in publishing

this story. Feminism cannot be about lifting yourself up while your sisters are trampled behind you. It is a movement for all of us. We must be united. We must be one. Women of the world: we must stop throwing ourselves upon the altar of male indifference (Bourland, 2017, p. 302).

In "*I'll Eat When I'm Dead*," Bourland criticizes the media industry's hypocrisy through the story of Callie Court. This quote demonstrates how *RAGE* magazine hides its real involvement in Callie's death by presenting itself as a feminist savior. As McRobbie argues, such cultural products produce "fantasy worlds for its female viewers" (as cited in Butler 2009, p. 953). In this case, *RAGE* presents a fantasy of feminist solidarity while obscuring the reality of its complicity in promoting deadly beauty standards. Although Callie died from the use of poisoned beauty products, which were promoted and consumed by the women working in the same magazine, *RAGE* concealed the truth. It turned Callie's tragedy into a marketable story that reinforces her public image. This hypocrisy shows the media's deeper role in women's commodification; while it claims to empower them, it actually upholds deadly beauty ideals that contribute to their destruction. Through this satiric approach, Bourland criticizes how the media exploits women's bodies, and even their death, for profit under a false mask of feminist solidarity. Through this portrayal, the media appears as an ideological state apparatus that works to interpellate women into self-monitoring and commodification roles while maintaining the illusion of empowerment.

Ultimately, in Paris, Hutton finds Cat in her room with Bess, happy to see them safe. They inform him that Lou is trying to poison them, and he reveals his plans to arrest her. Hutton and Cat find Lou, accusing her of financing illegal drugs through Bedford Organics, which resulted in deaths, including Callie Court's. Ironically, Lou responds coldly, denying responsibility and blaming women's choices. Cat accuses her of killing Hillary and Callie and trying to poison them. Lou insults the women, saying, "Bloody little addicts," Lou hissed "Pills to stay thin, pills to be smart, pills to sleep, injections, boot camps, surgeries. It's a wonder there weren't *more* corpses at the rate you lot were going (Bourland, 217, p. 321).

Lou's words are very harsh, as if Bourland is scolding women for accepting their own objectification and for their obsession with beauty, appearance, and trying to please the male gaze. It feels like she is saying, what happened to you is the result of your own choices, so do not blame others; you are the one who accepts this. At the same time, this quote shows how women are influenced or interpellated by media and beauty culture to consume diet pills and follow harmful beauty routines. By the end of the novel, it becomes clear how characters respond differently to this system. Cat quits *RAGE* magazine, which demonstrates her refusal to conform to the media's shallow expectations, while Bess. Finally, Lou, who tries to kill her friends, falls due to tight clothes,

highlighting the pressures of beauty standards. Hutton hardly tries to help her with her overly tight outfit, saying mockingly, "Don't these women ever eat?" (Bourland, 2017, p. 248), which shows how the pressure to look thin is not only harmful but also ridiculed by men who benefit from it.

Conclusion

Bourland, in *I'll Eat When I'm Dead,* expresses her views concerning the media and fashion industries, where women are treated as objects for financial goals. The ideologies conveyed by these institutions lead women to internalization, resulting in self-objectification and dehumanizing efforts to conform to beauty standards shaped by the male observation. The female characters are surrounded by images and ideas that define beauty within a patriarchal, capitalist society. Through Althusser's lens of interpellation, the analysis reveals how women sacrifice their well-being by wearing tight clothes, striving to be thin, and using harmful products to appear beautiful in the eyes of a controlling, male-dominated culture. They are interpellated as subjects through the ideological state apparatuses of media and fashion, which hail them into rigid gender roles and expectations, reducing their agency and individuality. Bourland satirizes the artificial ideals that lead women to lose their self-esteem and dignity to be socially accepted. The narrative shows how women are simultaneously producers and products of ideology, trapped in a cycle of consumption and conformity. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how ideology influences daily life, with even personal appearance choices shaped by broader systems of power and control.

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