The `Visible Face of Popular Culture: A Critique of the Culture Industry Through TV Competitions, Media Representations, and the Case of Nihal Candan

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how popular culture, disseminated through television and social media, transforms individual lives, specifically within the context of fashion-themed reality shows in Turkey. In this regard, the study focuses on the case of Nihal Candan, a contestant on the fashion competition show "İşte Benim Stilim" broadcast on TV8 in 2015, who later passed away due to anorexia. The research investigates how popular culture, mediated through television and social media, shapes perceptions and affects individual lives using content analysis methodology.

Nihal Candan's media-driven visibility, her constructed self-perception, and her life that ended in tragedy are examined to reveal the transformative power of the culture industry on the individual. Utilizing qualitative research methods, the study analyzes the formal characteristics of the television show, its representational strategies, and the cultural discourses embedded within it.

The findings demonstrate that the language used in televised popular culture and female representations involves ideological direction and encourages conformity to certain social norms. In this context, the culture industry not only shapes the intellectual and emotional world of individuals but also suppresses originality and weakens critical thinking.

Keywords: *Popular culture, media, television programs, Nihal Candan, culture industry, content analysis.*

INTRODUCTİON

Popular culture has historically been an important cultural tool that shapes individuals' value judgments, identities, and social roles. Culture, which plays a significant role in the formation of collective identities and the socialization processes of individuals, has been transmitted throughout history both naturally and through various means. However, in the modern era, culture has not only evolved as a spontaneous way of life but has also become an industry shaped and directed through media. The pioneering theorists of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2016), emphasized that culture has been industrialized in modern capitalist society and that this process weakens the critical capacity of the individual. According to them, cultural production takes on a "standardized and directed" form, turning the individual into a passive consumer. The culture industry functions as an ideological apparatus that pacifies individuals' abilities for original thinking. Television is one of the most widespread media platforms through which popular culture reaches the masses. While facilitating the sharing and reproduction of popular culture products, it also reshapes individuals' lifestyles, values, and self-perceptions. According to Raymond Williams (2003), television is not merely a communication tool but a powerful cultural apparatus that transforms social relationships, family structures, and everyday life. With technological advancements, television has both shaped domestic consumption and reinforced passivity in individuals, adapting to the needs of modern society. Along with this transformation, media today has become not only a vehicle for information and entertainment but also an ideological apparatus where cultural norms are produced, reproduced, and imposed on society. Mass communication tools do not simply convey information; they disseminate culture and facilitate its reconstruction. In his work *The Society of the Spectacle and Comments* (2006), Debord addresses capitalism's visual images and symbolic arrangements as an integral part of the commodity production process. According to him, life in modern society has become a accumulation of spectacles, where direct experience is replaced by representations. Specifically in the context of Turkey, Alemdar and Erdoğan (1990) emphasized the role of mass media in the reproduction of cultural values. Popular culture, particularly shaped through representations of women, has contributed to the construction of ideological norms in areas such as aesthetic perceptions, definitions of success, and social status.This study aims to examine the effects of popular culture conveyed

through media on individuals, focusing on the case of Nihal Candan, a contestant on the reality competition show *İşte Benim Stilim* aired on TV8 in 2015, who later died due to anorexia. Utilizing a qualitative research method and content analysis technique, the study evaluates Nihal Candan's media visibility, modes of representation, and related popular culture discourses. Normative discourses extracted from each episode of the program are analyzed within the framework of the Frankfurt School's culture industry theory, discussing the ideological impacts of these contents on individuals.

The research investigates how themes such as the female body, visibility, "success," and "beauty" are constructed in the media, and how individuals conform to and transform these norms. Accordingly, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

How does the reproduction of popular culture through television transform individuals perceptions of self and body?

How do reality competition shows like *İşte Benim Stilim* reflect the standardizing and directing nature of the culture industry through the representation of women?

In what ways does the case of Nihal Candan reveal the ideological functions of media on individuals within the contexts of the society of the spectacle and the culture industry?

In light of these questions, the study's theoretical foundation draws on critical theory from the Frankfurt School, Debord's society of the spectacle approach, and Stuart Hall's representation theory as key theoretical frameworks.

HEORETİCAL FRAMEWORK
2.1. Culture Industry Approach

Economic, cultural, and technological developments in the 20th century deeply impacted social structures, bringing individualism and consumption-based lifestyles to the forefront. Frankfurt School theorists Horkheimer and Adorno addressed this transformation in their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, explaining how individuals' intellectual and emotional worlds are directed through the concept of the "culture industry." This concept refers to culture's reduction to a structure of production and consumption within modern capitalist society (Slater, 1998, p. 173).

Under the influence of globalization, culture has ceased to be a spontaneously accumulated heritage and has instead become a consumer commodity shaped by media, advertising, and marketing techniques. This process diverts individuals from their genuine needs and directs them toward artificial desires through advertisements and visual imagery. Consumption has become not only an economic act but also a psychological, cultural, and social norm. Individuals are no longer driven solely by the fulfillment of their needs but are encouraged to consume products that carry symbolic meanings such as self-expression, belonging, or visibility. In this context, the capitalist system shapes culture by producing attractive and standardized commodities aimed at diverse social groups. Society is encouraged to consume these tailor-made contents (Featherstone, 2005, p. 188).

According to Topçuoğlu (1995, p. 116), social changes arising from processes like industrialization, urbanization, and massification have caused a negative transformation at the cultural level. Concepts such as popular culture and the culture industry have been used in critiquing this change. Adorno and Horkheimer (2003) argue that culture has ceased to be a sphere supporting individuals' intellectual and aesthetic development and has instead become a commodity standardized and marketed like factory products. The culture industry produces repetitive structures that transform individuals into passive consumers, rather than fostering originality and critical thinking (Özel & Mumyakmaz, 2018, p. 67).

Media is one of the fundamental tools of the culture industry. Erdoğan and Alemdar (1990) contend that media is not merely an information transmitter but an ideological mechanism shaping social norms (Erdoğan & Alemdar, 1990, p. 57; Oktay, 1995, p. 20; Topçuoğlu, 1995, pp. 116 -117).

Television programs guide individuals by shaping aesthetic understanding and social values; thus, culture is reproduced not directly from life but mediated through media. According to Topçuoğlu (1995, p. 118), such productions align individuals with the expectations of the system. As Horkheimer and Adorno (2003) point out, the culture industry pacifies individuals and weakens critical thinking. Media causes individuals to internalize the system's values at the expense of their originality (İrvan, 2014, p. 18). In this respect, competition shows like *İşte Benim Stilim* demonstrate how the culture industry operates through media.

These programs impose specific aesthetic and behavioral patterns rather than celebrating individual differences. Visibility does not only mean appearing on screen but also conforming to media codes. In the case of Nihal Candan, her need to alter her body and behavior to comply with jury and media norms reveals the pressures of concepts such as "female body," "success," and "beauty." Nihal's experience illustrates that the culture industry shapes not only visual representation but also individual identity and health.

Stuart Hall and the Theory of Representation

Today, media has evolved from merely transmitting events to becoming an ideological force that determines which issues enter the public agenda and how they are discussed. Stuart Hall's theory of representation provides a robust conceptual framework to understand how this ideological operation functions. According to Hall (1981a), representation does not directly reflect reality; rather, it constructs and reproduces it within specific ideological codes (Barrett, 1998, p. 270).

This indicates that media acts less as a conveyor of social values and more as a mechanism that redefines them and imposes normative pressures on individuals (İrvan, 2014, p. 30). In this context, female images, body norms, and narratives of success in media do not present social reality itself but a version of reality constructed through media.

Hall's work *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular* (1981a, p. 233) offers a vital theoretical framework for understanding the nature of popular culture and the power relations within it. Hall defines popular culture not as a static or unidirectional phenomenon but as a dynamic field of struggle where dominant cultural meanings and resistant practices contest each other. Within this framework, media is not only a tool for entertainment or consumption but also a representational space where social meanings are produced, transformed, and ideologically reconstructed.

From this perspective, formats centered around fashion competitions reveal how media functions not just as an entertainment platform but as an ideological apparatus that reproduces society's normative structures. In particular, statements like "you must be elegant" or "you should look thinner" directed at women in competition shows such as *İşte Benim Stilim* clearly demonstrate how aesthetic norms are reproduced through media. These representations do not remain confined to screens; through social media posts, audience comments, and online interactions, they reach wider audiences and remain in continuous circulation. Thus, media becomes a powerful ideological apparatus that reshapes not only individual identity but also gender roles and norms.

According to Althusser (2001, pp. 109-115), media is an ideological apparatus that "interpellates" individuals as subjects and positions them within the dominant ideology. Ideology operates through an imaginary relationship that individuals establish with their real living conditions. By responding to this "call," individuals internalize specific social roles as natural and inevitable. Media, as the primary carrier of this process, does not merely provide information or entertainment but defines what is true, beautiful, or acceptable, thus producing a normative framework.

Although Stuart Hall (1996b, p. 30) and Ernesto Laclau (1985, pp. 108-109) critique this approach for leaving little room for ideological struggle, they accept that the interpellation mechanism makes it possible for individuals to see themselves as "natural" subjects. In this context, media content not only represents individuals but also establishes a powerful spectacle order that shapes their identities.

This form of representation affects not only individual perceptions but also social norms as a whole. To better comprehend the ideological nature of these representations and their transformative power over individuals, it is necessary to engage with critical media theory. According to Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer, media today legitimizes ideological, political, and economic power as an irresistible force. Media operates as an extension of the culture industry; it suppresses originality, pacifies individuals, and weakens critical thought. In this process, media transforms individuals from questioning subjects into passive figures conditioned by consumption and conformity. Ideology-producing media influences the masses and standardizes them (Köker, 1998, pp. 52–59; İnal, 1996, p. 38; Jay, 1989, p. 99).

In modern society, reality ceases to be a directly lived experience and enters the realm of representations constructed by media. Individuals now exist more through the images presented to them than through direct experience. These spectacles are not merely aesthetic displays but also tools that serve to maintain

social, economic, and cultural power. To understand how this ideological order transforms into a broader social structure, Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* theory offers a critical contribution.

Debord and the Society of the Spectacle: The Construction of Artificial Reality in Media

According to Guy Debord, in modern society, visual images and symbols have ceased to be merely aesthetic or communicative tools; they have transformed into ideological elements used to secure the approval of the capitalist system. Reality is fragmented and then reassembled into an artificial totality, which is presented to the audience. This process turns the spectacle from a simple visual display into a social control mechanism that produces false consciousness (Debord, 2006, p. 35).

As Debord asserts, cinema and similar media forms are shaped in parallel with capitalist production processes and offer viewers a fabricated reality. In this process, both the physical and social environments are reorganized according to artificial representations; even scientific methods operate to produce and reproduce this constructed reality. Reality is reduced to decontextualized quantitative data; thus, although phenomena are formally equalized, their meanings change in content. Consequently, this artificially reconstructed reality centered around commodity production detaches itself from its essential context. Debord defines this situation as the "spectacle," an artificial form of reality representing the dominant mode of life in society (Debord, 2006, p. 37).

According to Postman, while for Native Americans communicating via smoke signals the message was primary, in television, the image precedes the spoken word. Television transmits images rather than words. McLuhan famously stated "The medium is the message," whereas Postman argued "The medium is the metaphor," emphasizing that the form of the medium limits cultural discourse (2010, pp. 16-17). Raymond Williams similarly considers television not just a technical invention but a cultural mechanism that transforms social structures. For Williams, television not only delivers news and entertainment but also reshapes individuals' everyday life experiences. In this context, television has been structured to meet the needs of modern society and has become a central component of the domestic consumption economy. Moreover, it functions as a cultural representation tool that manages individual passivity and regulates behavioral patterns (Williams, 2003, pp. 10-11).

The influence of media on individuals extends beyond mere visibility. Media produces social values while simultaneously redefining and imposing them on individuals. These forms of representation are not confined to competition settings; they reach wide audiences and re-enter circulation through social media posts, comments, and user interactions. Thus, media becomes not only an aesthetic authority but also a definitional force on what it means to be "a woman."

METHODOLOGY

In media studies, a significant area of research focuses on how media fulfills various functions such as entertainment, information, culture, and politics, and the effects it has on audiences. Media shapes public opinion by bringing specific issues to the forefront, often influencing individuals' thoughts unconsciously (Burton, 1995, p. 84).

This study aims to examine the impact of popular culture disseminated through television and social media on individuals. The research centers on the television competition "İşte Benim Stilim All Stars" as a concrete example of popular culture representations. A qualitative research methodology was adopted, utilizing content analysis techniques.The study specifically focuses on the media visibility and representation of Nihal Candan, a contestant in the "All Stars" season aired on TV8 in 2015, which comprised a total of 102 episodes.

Within this framework, the study explores the influence of the culture industry on the individual by applying the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Debord's society of the spectacle approach, and Stuart Hall's theory of representation. It discusses how popular culture, mediated through television, becomes an ideological apparatus.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The competition is evaluated as a media content where the norms related to female identity and visibility within popular culture are reproduced. Throughout the season, discourses surrounding aesthetic standards, definitions of success, criteria for social acceptance, and the female body frequently came to

the forefront. Accordingly, 20 episodes featuring Nihal Candan as a contestant were selected for analysis; however, full access was available for only 6 episodes.

Relevant videos were mostly accessed through YouTube platforms and some third-party video-sharing sites. However, TV8's official website and YouTube channel only provided short promotional clips, trailers, and summary content, with no full episodes available. Consequently, episodes that could not be included in the analysis were either entirely inaccessible or only available in brief promotional formats. This situation constitutes a significant limitation of the study and constrained the depth of the content analysis. The absence of full episodes in TV8's broadcast archive also reveals the inadequacy of digital accessibility in media archives, posing a structural obstacle for academic research. This limitation necessitated that the study proceed solely with the episodes that were accessible.

Sample and Data Analysis

The sample of this study consists of episodes from the television competition in which Nihal Candan participated as a contestant. Initially, a total of 20 episodes were selected for analysis; however, full access was available for only 6 episodes: episodes 15, 21, 30, 47, 97, and 102.

These episodes present distinct themes in terms of jury evaluations, contestant interactions, aesthetic comments, and language use. Notably, comments directed at Nihal Candan prominently reflect ideals of thinness, normative aesthetic guidance, criticisms related to appearance, and competitive exclusion. The disparaging, directive, and coded discourses used by jury members provide significant insights into how individuals are shaped through media.

Access to these episodes was generally obtained via open video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Dailymotion. For example, episodes 15 and 30 are available in full format on Dailymotion, while episodes 21, 47, 97, and 102 were analyzed based on recordings uploaded by individual users on YouTube.

In contrast, TV8's official website and YouTube channel only offer promotional content and short runway clips. Episodes 2, 29, 40, 67, 68, 69, 80, 95, 100, and 101 were excluded from the analysis due to availability only as trailers, runway clips, or brief promotional formats. For instance, only a short video titled "Nihal Candan on the runway" is available for episode 29, with no full episode accessible. Similarly, episode 2 includes only a brief walking clip.

Therefore, the analysis was conducted based on the six episodes with full content access, while other episodes were excluded due to insufficient content availability. This limitation was considered a key factor restricting the depth of the content analysis.

The selected episodes are particularly notable for the following reasons:

Episodes 15 and 21: Showcase Nihal Candan's intra-group relationships and her communication with the jury during the early stages of the competition.

Episodes 30 and 47: Serve as examples regarding her clothing choices, style preferences, and the reactions these elicited.

Episode 97: Features the performance prior to the final, where jury pressure is more explicitly felt.

Episode 102 (Final): Represents the conclusion of the competition and provides critical insights into how social status and the definition of "success" are constructed by the media.

The following section presents analyses based on the content of the accessible videos on YouTube within the scope of the competition.

Analysis Process

In this study, Nihal Candan's media representation in the television competition "İşte Benim Stilim All Stars" was examined using the content analysis method. The qualitative analysis focused on the discursive dimensions of media representations and was structured within the frameworks of the Culture Industry, Stuart Hall's representation theory, and Guy Debord's spectacle society approach.

The themes identified in the research include "female body," "beauty standards," "narratives of success," "jury discourse," "aesthetic norms," "visibility," and "normative guidance." Expressions by jury members such as "look more feminine," "be more elegant," and "you are not stylish" reflect the pressure to conform to hegemonic norms.

The episodes were analyzed in terms of jury-contestant interactions, language use, and bodily presentation, with remarks like "you should be thinner" considered as examples of normative pressure.

The analysis revealed the process through which media shapes the individual as a "subject," demonstrating Nihal Candan's transformation through jury criticisms, relationships, and discourses. Furthermore, the echoes created by television content on social media were also examined, highlighting the multilayered nature of media representation.

RESULTS AND DİSCUSİON

In-Depth Critical Analysis of Episode 15

In Episode 15, Nihal Candan portrays a hostess welcoming guests at the opening event of a major dessert brand. During her response to the host's question, "Where are you going?", a noticeable lapse in sentence structure occurs, which the host immediately emphasizes. This minor slip of the tongue is used as a pretext to question the contestant's stage competence and "professionalism." Fellow contestants describe Nihal's outfit as "plain," "ordinary," and "colorless." The matching tones of her lipstick, earrings, and dress are criticized, while her handbag is said not to coordinate with the outfit, and her shoes are deemed inappropriate. Nihal, however, defends her attire by stating that it suits her body shape and that she was trying to stand out. Nevertheless, the jury and other contestants consider this effort insufficient.

In the jury's evaluation, although Nihal's hairstyle is positively noted, her dress is described as "taking the easy way out," "cheap," lacking "any interpretation," and compared to "singers who ruin a song." Ultimately, the jury rates Nihal at the level of "you're not tacky, but you're not good either," labeling her performance as mediocre.

Cultural Industry Framework

The critiques directed at Nihal by the jury and contestants reveal that aesthetic values are measured not by individual creativity but by consumption-driven visual norms. While her dress is negatively judged as "cheap," the jury's emphasis on "lack of interpretation" indicates that even individual contributions must conform to certain formal patterns. Nihal's attempt to create a simple look is devalued because it does not align with the system's imposed aesthetic of being "flashy, eye-catching, expensive, and witty." This exemplifies Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the culture industry: autonomous individual production is undervalued, while formally approved system-based patterns are considered legitimate.

Debord: Reality Turned into Spectacle

Within Debord's framework of the society of the spectacle, Nihal's presentation in this episode transforms from a reality into a viewable and coded representation. The jury intervenes not only in the clothing worn but also in how it is presented, including facial expressions, tone, and even the grammatical correctness of sentences. This demonstrates that media applies normative control not only over appearance but also over language use. Nihal's explanation of "trying to be striking" is deemed insufficient by her competitors, indicating that the spectacle is measured by visibility, and any statement that fails to gain visibility is devalued.

Stuart Hall: Ideological Encoding in Representation

Comments such as "add some color" and "if you had one accessory, it would be more playful" from fellow contestants indicate that the media environment is structured around specific aesthetic codes. According to Hall's representation theory, these expressions are examples of the reproduction of normative codes aimed at women. Terms like "feminine," "fun," and "eye-catching" do not merely refer to fashion but also demonstrate how femininity norms are constructed. Nihal's attempt to draw attention with a simple appearance is labeled a failure when it contradicts media norms, leading to the marginalization of individual choices.

Thematic Evaluation

Female body and beauty norms: Although Nihal's outfit fits her body shape, the jury and contestants do not consider this sufficient. The media's expectation of the female body extends beyond conformity to include striking and exaggerated presentation.

Visibility and competition: Expressions like "You are not striking" turn visibility into a success criterion. The competition becomes a continuous contest for media attention among individuals.

Normative guidance: Presentation, sentence structure, and color coordination are evaluated according to normative patterns. The jury intervenes not only in aesthetics but also in linguistic and behavioral codes.

Competition and exclusion: Nihal's simple and low-budget choices are equated with falling outside the system. This reveals that the competition is shaped not only by fashion but also by socioeconomic and ideological codes.

In-depth Critical Analysis of Episode 21

In this episode, Nihal Candan's concept, expressed as "I'm going to a rock festival with heavy pop songs," is formally and thematically questioned by the jury members and fellow contestants. Criticisms regarding her outfit focus on the dress length, her loose hair, the lack of harmony with the leather jacket, and the overall look being described as "plain." This reflects not merely an aesthetic evaluation but also provides insights into how the media shapes the individual through specific norms.

Cultural Industry Framework

Expressions such as "you are too plain" and "give yourself some flair" by the jury clearly reveal the culture industry's expectations from the woman appearing on stage. Performance is evaluated not only by clothing but also by accompanying body language, hairstyle, posture, and manner of presentation. These criticisms mirror a system that expects the individual to be seen as a "fully-fledged" spectacle object on stage. Although the skirt Nihal wore is appreciated, the insufficiency is attributed to the lack of "complementary" elements driven by consumption. The jury's comment "I would buy this for my sister" also illustrates how objectifying aesthetic consumption has become banalized.

Debord: Reality Transformed into Spectacle

Nihal's concept is deemed weak by the jury on the grounds that it lacks sufficient "spectacle elements." Criticism for not having tied-up hair, not looking stylish, and not adding "something" to the outfit corresponds to Debord's principle that reality in the society of the spectacle is transformed into representation. The outfit being perceived as "everyday" does not mean it is unsuitable for the stage but shows that the spectacle system expects a more attention-grabbing persona. Spontaneity of the individual here is inadequate; the system demands more, flashier, and more "marketable" presentation.

Stuart Hall: Ideological Codings in Representation

The jury's statements like "give yourself some flair," "tie your hair," and "you are too plain" are ideological codings embedded in media discourse. These directives point to a structure that compels the internalization of certain behavioral and presentational norms regarding femininity. Suggestions such as tying hair and energizing the outfit enforce the necessity for the woman to appear on stage as not passive but as an attention-grabbing figure integrated with aesthetics. According to Hall's representation theory, these codings are either internalized or resisted by the contestant, though the hegemonic influence of the media mostly encourages the former.

Thematic Evaluation

Female body and beauty norms: Comments like "tie your hair," "add some flair," and "you are too plain" address not only clothing but also the presentation of the body, indicating that aesthetic expression is coded at bodily and behavioral levels beyond attire alone.

Visibility and Competition: Remarks such as "an indecisive concept" and "I give you five for coming out with this skirt" show that both clothing and conceptual success are scored, reflecting that visibility is equated with clarity and attention-grabbing qualities.

Normative Guidance: The jury's directives transcend individual preference, enforcing conformity to certain stage norms. Aesthetic freedom is suppressed, and a femininity ideal shaped according to jury norms is imposed.

Competition and Exclusion: Labeling the performance as "insufficient" or "too plain" critiques not only the aesthetic but also the contestant's presence. This reveals that in the competitive environment of the show, not only clothing but personality and modes of representation are evaluated within the arena of competition.

In-depth Critical Analysis of Episode 30

This episode is highlighted by the "Avant-garde" themed gala night. The host's introduction of the contestants' competition and performances with expressions such as "another 40 points have arrived," "we are festive," and "an interesting gala night" indicates that visuality and attention-grabbing elements take precedence in this episode. Nihal Candan's presentation of her concept through an absurd and

fictional narrative, saying "I'm coming from Mercury... I am the king's niece," reveals that the competition requires not only style but also a theatrical performance.

Cultural Industry Framework

The jury critiques Nihal's appearance both in terms of fashion and body. Her outfit is likened to a "costume party" attire and said to be incompatible with her body type, described as "a costume for tall people." This shows that aesthetic evaluation is coded not only through clothing but also conformity to bodily norms. The jury members' comments such as "if you hadn't made the first model you saw" and "wrong choice" indicate that accepted templates of the culture industry are prioritized over individual creativity. In this context, and in line with Debord's concept of "reality turned into spectacle," Nihal's individual performance becomes a representation shaped more by media norms than by originality.

Debord: Reality Transformed into Spectacle

Nihal's explanation, "I used red and blue because pop-art and avant-garde makeup came one after another," is an attempt to rationalize her style. However, the repeated accusations of "copying" and "copy-pasting" by the jury and contestants show how originality is overshadowed in media representation. One jury member's ironic and derogatory remark, "Nihal, what have you done to yourself?" likening her appearance to a "sea urchin," supports Debord's argument that spectacle suppresses subjectivity and alienates the individual from their own reality on stage.

Stuart Hall: Ideological Codings in Representation

Contestants' comments to Nihal such as "you look legless," "your skirt is irrelevant," and "I didn't like the boots, the bun, or your height" reflect the reproduction of idealized body and style representations in media. According to Hall's representation theory, these statements demonstrate how aesthetic and femininity norms are internalized and enforced both by the jury and the contestants themselves. Nihal's attempt to defend her own style, along with her emotional breakdown and tears on stage, illustrates how individual subjectivity is suppressed in media representation and forced to comply with normative guidance.

Thematic Evaluation

Female body and beauty norms: Comments like "this outfit is for tall people" and "you look legless" target not just clothing choices but the body itself. These expressions show that beauty norms are based not only on style but also body shape, with media acting as a tool for classification and regulation of the female body. Interventions such as hair being tied or makeup being criticized reveal how the body is reconstructed as an aesthetic object.

Visibility and Competition: Criticisms such as "I couldn't figure out what it was" and "a concept caught in-between" reveal that contestants are evaluated not only on their attire but also on the clarity and attention-grabbing nature of their concept. This demonstrates that media visibility is measured by striking impact as well as elegance, encouraging contestants to push boundaries to compete.

Normative Guidance: Directives like "your skin and body don't match this costume," "wrong choice," and "you should have tailored a different model" reproduce normative aesthetic templates that constrain individual creativity. Contestants are expected not only to follow rules but also to conform to the "appropriate woman" image shaped by media. This aligns with Stuart Hall's ideological coding process, reflecting how aesthetic behaviors are shaped through media.

Competition and Exclusion: Remarks such as "you are copy-pasting" and "if you think you have style, show it here" reveal that the struggle goes beyond aesthetics into questioning the legitimacy of individual identity performance. Competition thus becomes a contest over originality, creativity, and visibility, creating an exclusionary representational structure.

In-depth Critical Analysis of Episode 47

In Episode 47, Nihal Candan takes the runway with the concept of "a footballer's wife." She enters the stage with the words, "My icon, I'm going to a party." This mode of expression reflects not only a character but also the frequently reproduced media image of the "glamorous woman." However, this narrative is heavily criticized both by rival contestants and the jury. The originality of the concept is questioned; details such as the hood, metal accessories, and the cut of the outfit are described as "copycat," "inappropriate," and a "poor imitation."

In this episode, where the presented identity transforms into a performance focused on "visibility" rather than reality, the competition becomes not merely a platform for aesthetic evaluation but also an ideological arena where identities are contested and interrogated. The scrutiny of Nihal's outfit alongside her personal background (educational status, fashion knowledge, friendships) reveals how norms are reproduced not only in fashion but also in domains of femininity, status, and individuality.

The tension in the episode indicates the unraveling of Nihal's social relations within the competition. Conflicts among contestants demonstrate that "inter-identity competition" operates not only aesthetically but also psychologically. Nihal's tearful remark, "You destroyed the foundations and step on them," makes visible how fragile and competitive the foundation of female representations in the media is.

Cultural Industry Framework

Nihal's outfit is devalued with expressions such as "copycat" and "outdated," demanding conformity to trends over originality. Fashion production is stripped of its creative process and limited to consumption suitability. Moreover, the emotional tensions within the competition reflect the culture industry's structure that fosters performance-based rivalry rather than interpersonal intimacy.

Debord: Reality Transformed into Spectacle

Nihal's outfit and behavior turn into not just a style but a constructed persona. The critiques illustrate how reality gives way to representation, which in turn yields to spectacle. Even Nihal's crying is staged as part of this "spectacle."

Stuart Hall: Ideological Codings in Representation

Expressions like "you're not feminine" and "you come across as lacking" demonstrate the imposition of certain social and aesthetic norms on Nihal. Every representation in the competition is evaluated according to media-coded norms of femininity, originality, and success. The distinction between personality and attire is erased; the individual is judged in totality.

Thematic Evaluation

Female body and beauty norms: Remarks such as "feminine things don't belong to you" and "your body isn't suitable for avant-garde" clearly reveal how the body is coded by the media. The clothing and materials deemed inappropriate for Nihal's body show that aesthetic judgment is based not on personal taste but on normative beauty standards.

Visibility and Competition: Expressions like "you copied" and "you're a poor imitation" indicate that it is not only the outfit but the image the person represents on stage that is evaluated in the competitive environment. Media recognition depends less on originality and more on "drawing attention in the right way."

Normative Guidance: Technical comments from the jury such as "this fabric shouldn't have been like this" and "it doesn't suit your skin" reveal how narrowly the boundaries of originality in fashion are confined. Aesthetic expression is shaped within a tight framework determined by jury norms. The contestant is scored not on originality but on how well they conform to these norms.

Competition and Exclusion: Nihal's emotional breakdown remark, "You don't make friends here," reflects the media norms suggesting that personal bonds cannot be formed in the competition environment and that emotions must be suppressed. Subsequent comments like "you always come up short" demonstrate that Nihal is constantly judged not only by her attire but also by her personality. Criticism of clothing swiftly turns into character questioning. This reveals that in media representations, women are subject to continuous evaluation not only of their appearance but also their behavior, style, and social relations. Nihal's crying further exposes how emotional expression is often coded as "weakness" in media and sensitivity is framed negatively.

In-depth Critical Analysis of Episode 97

In the finale, Nihal Candan's media visibility and emotional expression are addressed far more intensively compared to previous episodes. The host's remark, "I felt like I would be eliminated for the first time," highlights both performance anxieties and the pressures she experiences within the context of media representations of femininity. Other comments span a range from

Cultural Industry Framework

The finale is shaped by the material and symbolic values invested in the competition. Nihal's statement, "I have shown myself to so many people mostly thanks to this competition," illustrates the competitive

link between individual visibility on social media and success. Aesthetic choices receive comments such as "I'm not satisfied with the fur," and "Did you get your belt tailored?" which reflect consumption-based professionalism norms. Media increasingly treats aesthetic preferences as packaged commodities presented within a competition format, prioritizing the constructed appearance over the individual's identity.

Debord: Reality Transformed into Spectacle

The finale presentation consists of representation rather than reality. Even Nihal's expression, "I was used to mental breakdowns," becomes a performative figure on social media. The jury judges not only based on clothing ("what is that fur?", "I didn't like those glasses") but on the entire representation, expecting individuals to present a "persona" instead of their real selves. Reality becomes visibility, and visibility turns into a staged spectacle.

Stuart Hall: Ideological Codings in Representation

The codes related to femininity become explicit: comments like "there is tulle," "did you tailor the belt yourself?", "I wish you had another jacket over it," demonstrate that aesthetic codes are normative and laden with expectations of stage performance. These codes clearly encode behavioral norms regarding "how to enact femininity," "how to look," and "where to cry." Even Nihal's emotional expression ("I'm used to breakdowns") carries a normative message, as Hall suggests: through the "emotional woman" image, media represents both softness and vulnerability.

Thematic Evaluation

Female body and beauty norms: A persistent perception of "this doesn't suit you" is created based on choices of clothing, accessories, and makeup. The female body and style are confined within aesthetics and equated with conformity to norms.

Visibility and competition: Nihal's social media statements emphasize visibility as a criterion of success. Yet, she is criticized for not being the "most loved" by the jury, indicating that the competition arena is shaped not only by aesthetics but also by mass appeal.

Normative guidance: Comments such as "I didn't like the glasses," "It should have been fur," and "Did you get the belt tailored?" illustrate the jury's enforcement of normative aesthetic boundaries. Emphasis is placed on adherence to fashion domain norms rather than personal preferences.

Competition and exclusion: Nihal's emotional state and past anxieties carried into the competition transform her into not just a contestant but a dramatic figure. This narrative mobilizes audience sympathy through constructed storytelling, establishing both an exclusionary and manipulative media mechanism.

In-depth Critical Analysis of Episode 102 (Final)

Nihal's statements, "the greatest prize is love" and "I tried to be a good person," reveal that the competition has evolved beyond a mere fashion program into an emotional "space for self-validation." However, this process operates less as authentic individual expression and more as part of dramatic narratives shaped by the media industry. The jury's comment, "you have a very passionate fan base," clearly demonstrates how visibility and commercialized popularity are intertwined with competitive success. The participant's value is measured not only by personal effort but also by the "fan economy" constructed through media.

Cultural Industry Framework

In the finale, the jury measures success not by originality or individual performance but by conformity to media aesthetics. Remarks such as "your presentation was effective but should have appealed more to the audience" link success to mass approval. This exemplifies the cultural industry's process of preparing the individual for consumption.

Debord: Reality Transformed into Spectacle

The emotional farewell in the finale is not merely a personal goodbye but has become a spectacle aimed at eliciting emotional engagement from the audience. The host's phrase, "I leave you with love," marks the point where the performance fully transitions into a staged representation directed at viewers. Nihal's speech exemplifies a "farewell monologue" crafted according to narrative conventions rather than authentic reality.

Stuart Hall: Ideological Coding in Representation

 Expressions such as "you worked hard," "you want to be crowned," and "you are a good contestant," which appear in the host and jury's speeches, reflect pre-coded representations of success and femininity as Hall discusses. The contestant is expected not only to demonstrate talent but also emotional

commitment, humility, and "likability." Nihal's phrase, "I hope you liked me," indicates internalization of these codes and how the individual's desire for acceptance is shaped by media representation.

Thematic Evaluation

Female body and beauty norms: Statements like Nihal's "I tried to be a good person" during the farewell reveal that women are judged not only on talent but also on emotional integrity and ethical stance.

Visibility and competition: The jury's emphasis on "your fan base is very large" illustrates that media value is now measured not by style alone but by digital resonance (followers, likes, visibility).

Normative guidance: The farewell moment contains all the elements of a classic television finale: dramatic music, family figure (grandmother), heartfelt speech, audience address. This indicates a media narrative shaped by format rather than individual agency.

Competition and exclusion: Success and competition are defined not by individual originality but by "visual and emotional impact" aligned with media norms.

CONCLUSİON

This study examined the effects of popular culture disseminated through media on individuals, particularly within the framework of the female body, visibility, and social acceptance criteria. The research focused on the TV8 program *İşte Benim Stilim All Star*, applying qualitative content analysis through the case of Nihal Candan. A total of ten episodes accessed via YouTube and other platforms were analyzed, including jury comments, contestants' statements, and the overall structure of the program.

The findings reveal that the discourse directed at Nihal Candan in the competition repeatedly reflects body norms, the idealization of thinness, and appearance-focused guidance in both explicit and implicit forms. The jury's derogatory and normative language, combined with the exclusionary relationships established among contestants, highlights the competitive and discriminatory nature of the program. This situation aligns with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, demonstrating that the media does not directly reflect reality but constructs it within certain ideological codes.

The dominant discourses in the program redefine individual values through fashion, beauty, and visibility, incorporating individuals into a normative system grounded in consumer culture. This form of representation shapes not only visual aesthetics but also self-perception and social identity. When evaluated within the framework of the Frankfurt School's concept of the culture industry, such competitions appear not merely as entertainment tools but as ideological apparatuses that guide and pacify individuals.

Guy Debord's spectacle society approach further supports this process. Nihal Candan's visibility before the media renders her part of popular culture; however, the expectations directed at her body, behaviors, and identity create conflicts with her reality. The representation constructed through the body gradually isolates the individual and exerts psychological pressure.

The key finding of this research is that popular culture disseminated via television not only positions individuals as passive spectators but also weakens their capacity for critical thinking, questioning, and developing alternative identities. The media reshapes concepts such as aesthetics and success, thereby molding individual subjectivity and reproducing dominant ideology.

Authentic culture is not merely a domain reduced to entertainment but must be reconstructed through aesthetics, critique, and free thought. The case of Nihal Candan tragically illustrates the profound impact this cultural and ideological pressure can have on an individual.

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