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Humans as Resources: Commodification of People in Ready, Set, Love (2024)

Abstract

In 2024, Netflix aired its new addition to the already flourishing genre of dystopian TV series. Ready, Set, Love is a Thai comedy romance show set in a world where an epidemic has all but wiped-out men and lowered the birthrate of baby boys to just 1%, turning men into a coveted treasure. Protected at all times, men live in an isolated area called The Farm, and they find partners via the eponymous dating show. The plot intertwines the love story with a gradual exposure of sinister governmental machinations ubiquitous to dystopia. This article aims to analyze how both the game show and the governmental regime objectify and commodify people to gain commercial profit and biopolitical power. The levels of objectification will be examined through the lens of Marxist postulates and reality television scholarship on the one hand and Foucauldian biopolitics on the other.

Keywords: biopolitics, commodification, dystopia, Ready, Set, Love, reality television

1. Introduction

Following the epidemic of 1974 that caused an estrogen malfunction, the male population has been decimated. In fact, 99% of babies born that year were female, and the trend continued in 2024. For their own protection, the men live isolated from the rest of society on The Farm. Every four years, the state organizes a dating competition sponsored by a company called Eve Mart. In the game show, women go through several challenges to win the hand of one of the men serving as the prize. This is when Ready, Set, Love (2024), a Thai show directed by Yanyong Kuruangkura, begins. The series centers on Darika “Day” Chokwithee (played by Kemisara

Paladesh), who was entered into the show through the lotto system by her ill younger sister. However, it is soon revealed that the lotto system is merely a masquerade of equality: the outcome of the show is predetermined. It will be won by the daughter of the owner of Eve Mart. She is supposed to marry Son (played by Pongtiwat Tangwancharoen), the most popular of the five bachelors on offer in the show's 2024 version. Beyond this overt corruption, the viewers are gradually introduced to the oppression interwoven into the fabric of its society. Most significantly, the baby boys are taken to The Farm without their mothers' consent. Essentially, this government practice reveals that people (both women and boys) are viewed as a resource and property, whereas the men are, later, further commodified as prizes in a dating show. The romance of the series, centering on Day and Son's growing feelings for each other, is thus disrupted by the dreary dystopian regime.

Because of its premise, this dystopian show aligns with the battle royale genre and many world-famous examples, including Battle Royale (Koushun Takami, 1999; movie adaptation directed by Kinji Fukasaku, 2000), Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games (2008-2010), and Squid Game (directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk, 2012-2025). Unlike the listed works, Ready, Set, Love does not focus on the bloodthirstiness of the competition. Its romance-driven storyline employs the premise of the worldwide phenomenon The Bachelor, the still ongoing American reality TV. Because of this, it also echoes another mid-2010s pop culture artifact: The Selection series (2012-2016) by Kiera Cass. Evidencing the permeability of genre borders that allow hybrids, this dystopian romance book series centers on America Singer, one of the girls Selected for the competition to win the heart of the prince. Clearly, Ready, Set, Love exists in a milieu where audiences enjoy stories of contests, be they of a violent nature or a romantic one. Paired with dystopian settings, these stories offer insight into human desires. Namely, works set in grim futures, dystopias, actually take place in worlds that are meant to magnify the current situations in our real societies (Booker 20) or posit the possibility of such a future should humanity (continue to) make bad decisions (Vieira 17). In the words of Adam Stock, "[m]odern dystopian fiction often projects action forwards into the future in order to look back toward the present" (13). For example, in The Hunger Games, the lavish lifestyle of the elites is juxtaposed with the somber existence of the poor, whereas Squid Game scorns the exploitative capitalist society. What, then, could be the driving motive of Ready,

Set, Love? This article aims to contribute to the existing knowledge of dystopian fiction by examining what real-world issues are prevalent in new additions to the genre. With the show being set in the fictional year of 2024, the themes chosen for the show are apparently ones that preoccupy our immediate present, making the series broadcast on a widely available streaming platform an invaluable source for examining the social milieu. The goal of the paper is thus to analyze how Ready, Set, Love is concerned with the commodification of people, both through the game show and in using people as biopolitical docile bodies. To this end, the article will first outline the predominantly non-violent treatment of bodies in this series to explain that violence has been abandoned in favor of other types of using the human body. It then analyses the commodification in the game show, using Marxist tenets and investigating the conventions of reality television to explain how it sells products, the concept of love, and, most importantly, people themselves. Finally, the article applies Michel Foucault's biopolitics to determine how the dystopian government uses its institutions to control its subjects by turning them into docile bodies.

2. Ready, Set, Love: A Dystopia of Commodities

The already mentioned contemporary dystopian staples utilizing the game show motif—The Hunger Games, Squid Game—are emblematic of the contemporary works set in a dismal future being explicitly violent. These examples go against Michel Foucault's notion that the modern society has moved past spectacles of violence (Pataki Šumiga 32). According to Foucault, "[a]t the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared; the tortured body was avoided; the theatrical representation of pain was excluded from punishment" (Discipline 14). Instead of violence, modern societies, as well as seminal dystopian works such as Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932) and George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), govern their subjects through systems of control, as will be explained in more detail later. Yet contrary to this tradition, "contemporary dystopias exhibit a more explicit, violent, and abusive treatment of the body than do the canonical texts that established the genre" (Pataki Šumiga 154). Curiously, Ready, Set, Love aligns with the tradition of the canon works in that it does not feature explicit violence. The show in which the contestants take part does not put the women in danger. When the women fail to finish a challenge, they are fakely gassed by masked

guards but remain unharmed (“Know Your Date” 00:36:54). In general, the game show has very low stakes, as the worst thing that can happen to a regular participant is being eliminated; sometimes they even have a chance to do an extra challenge to attempt to remain in the game (“Know Your Date” 00:45:50). When the concept of the game pits participants one against another, they fight by harmlessly hitting opponents with a laser beam (“Hansel and Gretel” 00:07:07). The most violent game is the last one, where the finalists compete for marriage with one of the men and have to persevere through being hit with foam toys and a water cannon (“Say I Do” 00:34:23; 00:41:41). Evidently, the show is not built around the spectacle of violence. In a similar vein, society functions without overtly disciplining and punishing the unruly subjects. The physical violence of the regime is visible in its elimination of intruders or dissidents (“Racing to Love” 00:00:02; “Say I Do” 00:19:54), but this is not publicly advertised.

Yet both the game show and the regime rely on conventions or processes that objectify people and thus subjugate them. Namely, they turn people into commodities they can sell or otherwise control. Karl Marx famously explains the concept of a commodity as valuable “from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labor. It is as clear as noonday, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him” (31). In other words, “commodification refers to the process of assigning market value to goods or services that previously existed outside of the market” (Constable 50). When humans are the ones turned into commodities, this means they are stripped of their subjectivity and turned into objects: “Commodification insists upon objectification in some form, transforming persons and their bodies from a human category into objects of economic desire (…) [It] dehumanize[s] individuals and categories of persons in the name of profit” (Sharp 293). The article now turns to the two levels of commodification in Ready, Set, Love—the one conducted through the game show and the more sinister, regime use of humans.

2.1. Panem et Circenses: The Game Show Commodification of the Self

As a game show, Ready, Set, Love belongs to the genre of reality television. In it, regular people, non-actors, are put in situations that simulate real situations or environments with allegedly unscripted dialogues and no predetermined outcomes. Reality TV has become “a visible staple of television culture, even as critics and TV viewers alike recognized (and often bemoaned) its scripted dimensions, commercial manipulations, recombinant tendencies, and stage-managed emotional appeals” (Ouellette 1). Most obviously, the commercial character of Ready, Set, Love is visible in the standard convention of reality TV: sponsorship and product placement. First of all, the whole endeavor is sponsored by Eve Mart, whose logo appears throughout the episodes. The show also follows the strategy of real-life producers who often utilize product placement by creating environments where the use of a given product seems natural (Deery 10-11). At breakfast, for example, Day eats branded cereal with branded milk. In the segment, when referring to the sponsored product, she promptly grins and looks into the camera, akin to how Erving Goffman describes a performance put on with the object to advertise a product: “service personnel (…) enliven their manner (…) often its major purpose is to establish a favorable definition of their service or product” (77). The product’s subtle “insertion is also meant to diffuse viewer resistance to commercial messages” (Deery 11). Since the outcome is predetermined and the contest is therefore a moot point, the show’s primary function is to maximize its revenue. Son summarizes: “ Ready, Set, Love is just a fancy advertisement” (“Beyond the Wall” 00:43:20).

Not only does Ready, Set, Love profit from selling physical products but it also, like its real-world counterparts, “cash[es] in on an activity as intimate and significant as choosing a spouse” (Deery 6). With marriage as the objective, an alleged love match, the show turns the simulacrum of love into marketable entertainment. By participating in the show, people are exchanging the activity of looking for love for the possibility of economic profit gained by marrying a man from The Farm. Conversely, while the men, at least nominally, can truly marry someone they have grown to love, the women’s primary goal seems to be the economic profit and the social capital of having a man and living on The Farm. Thus, their ostensible search for love merely hides the commodities they actually seek. Moreover, with the result arranged, the show also commodifies the concept of love into an object that a high-paying customer can buy. Namely, outsiders, those not involved in the production, acknowledge that “[a]ll the winners are from the elite” (“Cooking Run” 00:05:13),

evidently noticing that commoners do not get their happily-ever-afters with men from The Farm. When Son tells Day that the outcome is predetermined, she, like many disgruntled viewers unhappy with the dubitable status of reality TV as "real," is quick to accept this: "Well, it's showbusiness. Reality shows are all scripted. I understand" ("Beyond the Wall" 00:44:18). Obviously, the common people of the Ready, Set, Love show they are aware of the potential machinations by the producers and realize that the secret to becoming a bride is bribing your way to the altar. For the commoners, the notion of love has been molded into a commodity you can pay for, while those familiar with the production strategies realize that love has been distilled into the commodity of profitable marriages.

Except for abstract concepts, reality television also commodifies people. By entering a reality show, participants employ their bodies for a goal, usually of an economic nature (Deery 2). The concept of the body as property rests on Locke's writings that "every man has a property in his own person (…) The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his" (17). In reality TV, participants use their bodies for commercial purposes. They willingly expose themselves and their daily lives to the eyes of the many. In other words, they and their private lives are commodified as a source of entertainment for the masses. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard, June Deery notes the similarities between the appeal of pornography and reality TV, in the sense that "Reality TV participants knowingly display themselves—or rather images of themselves—to a mass and invisible audience. It is often an intimate exposure of what is normally considered private" (8). The situation in Ready, Set, Love follows this template: by entering the show, they consent to have their privacy broadcast for all to see. In surveying the participants and taking away their privacy, the show draws on the panoptic structures written about by Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault. At the same time, Thomas Mathiesen's concept of the synopticon— "a unique and enormously extensive system enabling the many to see and contemplate the few" (219)—is evident in the fact that countless viewers tune in to watch each new episode. The viewers have the privilege to watch their dates, their friendship struggles, their emotional outpours, such as Day's frustrated scream when she thinks she will lose a game ("Know Your Date 00:49:40), and so on. Again, private lives are commodified as mass entertainment.

While all participants undergo general commodification through being objects of entertainment, Day's experience is naturally given the spotlight. Her commodification functions in two main ways. She both commodifies herself and is commodified by the show. Typically, a "dystopian narrative dramatizes the difficulties and dangers faced by an individual who is either a visitor or a dissident citizen" (Parrinder 156). While Day starts off as a complacent subject, she soon joins the resistance movement that is trying to free men and allow women to keep their sons. In the beginning, Day's complacency is marked by her existence within the system and voluntary self-commodification. She willingly participates in the show and exchanges herself for the opportunity to profit. Namely, although dating shows typically "do not foreground the acquisition of wealth (…) even here this can emerge as a primary motive" (Deery 12). For Day, winning the contest means she will get access to the otherwise unattainable medical treatments her sister needs. Moreover, at one point, she believes that she will only be able to secure her spot in the show if she pretends to be someone she is not. This is in line with how participants in reality television often manufacture "personae and put them to commercial use" (Hearn 136). Since products are material manifestations of human labor (Locke 17; Marx 32), a public persona is likewise "a property right based upon the labor invested into the image" (Halbert 39). This means that people not only participate in the show for profit but also put on a performance to exaggerate or highlight a particular personality trait—to sell it. A 'performance,' defined by Erving Goffman, is "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (15). Specifically, Day corroborates Goffman's finding that people project images of themselves in agreement with how they want to be treated (13). In this case, Day's goal is to get Son to like her, so she acts in a way that she believes will appease him—pretending that her greatest goal is to live on The Farm with him ("Cooking Run" 00:43:35). By creating this persona, she participates in the 'spectacularization' of the self (Hearn 138). That is, Day commodifies and exploits her persona for the sake of becoming an attractive (media) presence and hence improving her family's situation. She does not believe she will truly find love in the show and only stays for the promise of an economic benefit, turning her own body into a commodity she can exchange for this payment and molding her person into someone she is not. In her mission to achieve a higher financial rank, she is untruthful and therefore proves Goffman's observation "that upward mobility

involves the presentation of proper performances and that efforts to move upward and efforts to keep from moving downward are expressed in terms of sacrifices made for the maintenance of front" (36).

Her utilization of a produced persona also further commodifies the love that the show offers as a prize. According to Marx, the exchange of products establishes "material relations between persons and social relations between things" (32). Thus, keeping in mind that Day's body and persona are seen as a product, the only relationship she can establish with a man on the show is a material one, not a social, loving one. She sets out to exchange her body for material profit, turning the professed search for love into an object of economic exchange. Luckily for the romance of the show, Son sees through her front, the manufactured persona, and confronts her about her duplicity. Having grown up affluently and having since been disillusioned by the oppressive life on The Farm, he wants to leave The Farm and does not understand why she would lie about this. In this, he proves that "[t]he conflation of intimate social relations with monetary value is criticized by those who imagine a more altruistic or authentic precapitalist past or who view the domestic sphere as a proper shelter from the harsh and impersonal world of market capitalism" (Constable 54). That is, his financial privilege prevents him from seeing that a person of lesser means would lie for profit. Day explains: "Does a man who only lazes around living a happy life and gets supported by the government like you have the right to criticize me for not being myself? Yes, someone like me is willing to do anything for a better life. I can't be myself all the time like you" ("Cooking Run" 00:51:03). Like a "disciplined performer," "[s]he can suppress [her] spontaneous feelings" (Goffman 216) and pretend to be someone she is not. Although reality TV follows no scripted dialogue (Montemurro 93), Day is adhering to a script that she believes will help her sell herself to Son and the audience. She quickly abandons this act but continues to take part in the show while obeying the sponsor and the producer, thereby still commodifying herself with a materialistic goal in mind that only later develops into rebellion.

On the other hand, the producer, Jenny, is keen on keeping her on the show because she knows Day's story and personality will appeal to the audience. This directly correlates with how "[i]n Reality TV different categories of people are often thrown together in order to attract a broad audience with matching demographics and to create just enough conflict to generate drama but not

enough to really question the status quo" (Deery 13). Including Day on the show will sate the common masses and soften the blow of the predetermined outcome of the show. To this end, when Day expresses a wish to leave because her sister has been hospitalized, Jenny reminds her: "Do you know the prize for the winner? You will marry one of the men and become part of The Family. That means you and your family will be well-cared for by the government. When you get sick, you will get treatment from the best doctors" ("Know Your Date" 00:28:18). Jenny's piece of advice is not as altruistic as it seems. As soon as she is alone with her staff, Jenny commands: "Get a lot of footage of this girl (…) Family drama that people would love to root for will help us with the ratings" ("Know Your Date" 00:29:29). The plan comes to fruition when the show receives excellent ratings thanks to Day's presence. Therefore, Day's familial and financial situations have been turned into commodities. They are deemed attractive to viewers and will hence turn a profit..

Additionally, Day incites active audience engagement. Like in many other reality shows, the audiences are involved in the production. They not only consume the show but also engage with the show's social media, vote for their favorites, and so on. These "shared production and consumption efforts of the participating parties determine the direction of the show" (Bonsu et al. 97). In Ready, Set, Love, although the main outcome is predetermined, the votes directly influence the results of various challenges—the lowest rated person is removed from the show, whereas the highest rated gets special benefits ("Cooking Run" 00:31:29). Day is a favorite because the audience sees themselves in her. She soon remains the only "Lotto Girl" in the show and represents the most widespread demographic: middle- to lower-class people. They hail her as their champion and see her as a symbol of hope for a better life and equality. Her presence in the show "gives people hope when everything has been planned out" ("Say I Do" 00:11:07). The audience's emotional attachments have thus been successfully turned into "pliable 'objects' amenable to rationalization and commodification" (Bonsu et al. 104). Her status as an attractive media commodity hinges both on her personal drama and the wider populace's desire for a rags-to-riches story that will reassure them. Ultimately, the active engagement (voting, commenting on social media) of the audience is "reflective perhaps of the wider political sphere in which citizens are being replaced by consumers and in which interactive voting for reality show outcomes functions as an ersatz democracy" (Deery 15).

Indeed, this brings up the notion of panem et circenses. In Ancient Rome, the phrase panem et circenses was used to scorn “the limited horizons of the urban rabble” (Beard 228), who were complacent when provided with food rations and the spectacle of the chariot races. In dystopian fiction, the undoubtedly most prominent use of the term is found in Collins’s The Hunger Games, set in a country called Panem and revolving around the spectacle of games related to food rations being allotted to submissive citizens. Similarly, Ready, Set, Love reveals how, through the media, the elites in the world of Ready, Set, Love direct the populace’s attention to the engaging love story and the competition narrative, hiding the dark obverse of the shiny, polished life presented to the masses. People are manipulated to overlook their own low quality of life and instead chase the high of living vicariously through the victors of the competition. What is more, they are kept from the knowledge of baby boys being stolen from their mothers, which will be elaborated upon in the following section. In the first season of Ready, Set, Love, the manipulation tactic seems effective. While dystopias “are often overly zealous in their insistence on the necessity for happy endings, imagining deviant rebels who beat the system, implausibly rescuing their central characters,” Ready, Set, Love subscribes to the more recent branch of dystopia, signified by “an increasing trend towards post-apocalyptic despair” (Claeys 489). Despite the activities of a group of dissidents working to save the men from captivity and the uproar at the culmination of the game show, when Day and several other characters manage to escape into the wilderness, the teaser at the end of the series, which is set four years later, reveals that the system is undisrupted and that the games are set to be repeated.[1]

2.2. People as Reproductive and Commercial Commodities

Whereas the commodification of competitors like Day is at least partially consensual, albeit driven by economic motives, the prized men are unambiguously presented as commodities. However, they are not the only ones suffering. Rather, outside of the game, both men and women are turned into commodities—they are systematically oppressed through the commodification of their reproductive labor. With the men also being used for economic profit, the series reveals the exploitation on two fronts: political and economic. They will be examined through the Foucauldian notion of ‘biopolitics,’ which has replaced the violent subjugation and ‘death spectacles’ of previous

societies and “underpins the majority of discourses found in utopias and dystopias alike” (De Beauregard 691). Instead of resorting to violence, the modern government relies on a system of regulation and control. The biopolitical power they use is “essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it” (Foucault, History 136). The focus, therefore, lies on “the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (Foucault, History 139). Institutions such as the healthcare ones are put to work to establish “a high degree of control and discipline (…) and power structures eventually take charge of the bodies and lives of the population, managing it at the will of the institutions and mechanisms that bring about biopower” (Suijker 543). This system sees subjects as ‘docile bodies,’ which “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, Discipline 136). Appropriately, this phrasing evidences the objectification and commodification of people.

Like other dystopian governments, the one in Ready, Set, Love is authoritarian, exploitative, and focused on the biopolitical mechanisms of control. In line with dystopian fiction in general, which has “achieved symbolic cultural value in representing fears and anxieties about the future” (Stock 14), Ready, Set, Love questions the way of life in a (near) future where people are seen as commodities. The docility of the subjects allows the government to control “others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (Foucault, Discipline 138). Due to the epidemic and a steep decline in the births of boys, the powers-that-be have implemented strict rules: all boys are taken away from their mothers and made to live on The Farm. To begin with, this process takes away the agency of the mothers. Evoking real-life examples of population programs that “define yet another significant arena that reflects an intensified interest in female bodies” (Sharp 300-1), the show comments on the unjust maltreatment of women, thus joining a vast body of the still relevant “stories of the systemic negation of female bodily autonomy and (ab)use of the female body” (Pataki Šumiga 93). The female body is defined by its unique ability to give birth. Consequently, “female reproduction renders women’s bodies particularly vulnerable to regulation and commodification” (Sharp 299). The dearth of men causing implementation of regulation

confirms that "[i]n certain contexts, the state may claim collective rights to citizens' bodies and their reproductive potential" (Sharp 300). The women in the show are robbed of their reproductive labor, thereby converted into production factories. These female bodies fit Foucault's description of "the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (History 139). Those who do not wish to give up their sons are drugged, tranquilized, and imprisoned. They are released only if they become complacent, either because they have truly been brainwashed or because they pretend to have been ("Beyond the Wall" 00:51:25). Women who mother boys are, then, used and discarded when they have truly or ostensibly been transformed (back) into docile subjects. In the Marxist sense, their reproductive labor is stolen for the economic profit generated by the government, and the game show producers use the boys to their own ends.

Consequently, the boys are also treated as governmental commodities. While the status of the fetus is still an emotive question, being variously regarded "as the mother's organ, as an autonomous being, as a work object, or as social property among, for example, obstetricians, perinatologists, fetal surgeons, the pregnant mother and her kin, and anti-abortion activists" (Monica J. Casper qtd. in Sharp 301), this series positions the (male) fetus as the property of the government. After determining the gender of the fetus via the ultrasound, male fetuses must be reported to the government ("Beyond the Wall" 00:23:12).[2] Later, to prevent biological attachment, boys cannot see their mothers (or have any other contact with outside world) until they turn eighteen years old ("Hansel and Gretel" 00:49:40). This agrees with the standard formula of dystopian fiction, wherein the setting is "essentially a closed society offering neither exit nor entry" (Parrinder 169). The lack of freedom is translated into other spheres of life, as well. Although life in The Farm is represented as idyllic, forced custody strips the boys of the opportunity to make their own choices when they are older. As one character explains to her daughter: "The government lied to us. Your brother had to live in The Farm without having the chance to choose his own life" ("Beyond the Wall" 00:00:29). Their bodies are subsequently governed by their strict schedules, in accord with the Foucauldian shaping and steering of the docile body: "I live my life on a schedule, eat according to my dietician, exercise with my trainer, and study with a professor with a doctorate.

When I get a little sick, top doctors flock to treat me. That's my life" ("Beyond the Wall" 00:36:18). Finally, reflecting other dystopias thematizing "the dangers of digitization" (Johns 180), the men's identification records are digitally stored in a high-security restricted area ("Racing to Love" 01:00:57), further cementing the status of men as commodities to be collected, filed, and preserved.

The government takes away the political rights of both the mothers and the sons, but the latter are then also turned into commercial commodities. While dealing with The Handmaid's Tale and drawing on economic concepts, Janelle Pötzsch explains the connection between concentrated political and economic powers: "This high concentration of political power is . . . used to set up extractive economic institutions which extract resources from a society for the benefit of its rulers" (33). That is, in a mutually beneficial setup, the politicians work in tandem with the nation's economy. It has already been explained how Ready, Set, Love is essentially a big commercial for its main sponsor, Eve Mart. The firm profits directly from the existence of The Farm, a biopolitical institution, and in turn matches the men with designated women, continuing the biopolitical project. Their profit does not stem only from product placement and high audience engagement: the men are themselves profitable commodities. Because of the low numbers, they have "become an invaluable resource" ("Cooking Run" 00:36, my emphasis). Like other "metaphorical references of fragmentation and objectification" that "frequently flag body commodification" (Sharp 295), this phrase signals the relegation of men to objects to be sold. In line with this, one of the contestants says: "This is our chance to catch…I mean, to marry a guy" ("Know Your Date" 00:17:03). In other words, men are objects to be caught, and this woman's desire for "a guy" implies the interchangeability of the men: any man would do. In another instance, Son compares the men in The Farm to fish in a tank ("Beyond the Wall" 00:11:57), underlining that they are being exhibited like objects to be spectated. Men are valued on account of being men, not for the love that could grow in a marriage, not for their personality, behavior, or even looks. Instead, their male body, their Otherness to the now predominant women, is commodified, serving as a prize in a competition. Despite the apparently common and successful use of IVF, women desire men for both, one assumes, sexual gratification, and for the opportunity to create an "organic" family. Being a part of an "organic" family, where a child is born with two biological parents, is seen as a sign of prestige

("Know Your Date" 00:17:49). Therefore, men in Ready, Set, Love are objectified through language and are seen as desirable goods that bring about (social) profit. Their status as commodities is best captured in Son's resignation, "it's just a system that makes men the property of the elites. Ready, Set, Love is just a grandiose drama to fool us into thinking we have equal rights. In reality, before women could become The Ladies, they had to pay a lot of bribes" ("Beyond the Wall" 00:50:09). As has already been explained, the elites pay for their victory. Yet Son here reveals that all other participants, except for the newly introduced "Lotto Girls," pay for the chance to participate and hence win the love of a man from The Farm.

Lastly, the situation of one of the men, nicknamed Paper, embodies a conflation of political and economic interest in the men. While in dystopian fiction "specifically queer narratives are still at the margins" (De Beauregard 697), the inclusion of Paper's queer identity casts light on the workings of the society presented in Ready, Set, Love. As Paper grows into his identity as a homosexual, it becomes evident that men's potential non-normative sexualities are not allowed to exist openly in this world. Politically, his homosexuality would present a loss of biopower, as the government's goal is to create more families with two biological parents. Commercially, it would be a financial failure since he would not be able to take part in the game show and would thus decrease the revenue. As a commodity in a Marxist sense, men are only valuable if they align with the normative sexualities and identities whose reproductive labor can be wielded to the liking—and profit—of the government.

3. Conclusion

Ultimately, the romance and comedy of Ready, Set, Love are deceivingly cheerful. In fact, the show exposes the harsh realities of this fictional world: that people commodify themselves and are simultaneously commodified by the media for the promise of a financial reward, and that the regime commodifies people for their reproductive abilities using the biopolitical mechanism of control. Fulfilling the dystopian drive to unmask existing problems by setting them in the future, the show highlights the ongoing economic exploitation of people, as well as the denial of their bodily autonomy in the present day. The themes this show tackles are not new ones—works such as The Hunger Games and The Handmaid's Tale are well-known dystopias that show people relegated to

the status of objects used for entertainment or reproduction. Yet Ready, Set, Love is significant in that it clearly emphasizes how much the current society is willing to accept the status quo under the influence of contemporary media and pop culture that keep the real problems out of mind and out of sight. With this dystopia being set in the fictional year of 2024, the grim future of Ready, Set, Love is prominently figured as our real present and therefore worth examining.

In terms of media commodification, it must be highlighted that the women of the show voluntarily participate in Ready, Set, Love. They give their bodies and personas over to the media production firm in exchange for a reward. For the elite, rich women, the main reward is a man they can settle with. For Day, as a representative of the middle class, the goal is financial stability. In both cases, the women commodify themselves into media products. Interesting personas, such as Day's, are especially at risk of being exploited by the producers, which further commodifies them. Except through the media, people are also commodified through biopolitical structures that strip them of agency and autonomy. The male fetus is invaluable because of its scarcity, and the baby boy is taken away from the mother immediately after birth. This process commodifies both the mother and the child, effectively turning the former into an incubator, while the latter's kidnapping embodies the governmental view that people are objects that they can rule and command. The boys are then strictly regulated while living on The Farm, all with the goal of keeping their status as a valuable resource: to satisfy the consumers as well as the biopolitical regime, they must be attractive (educated, physically fit, and so on) and healthy. In this way, they are certain to be a commercial success as well as an appealing commodity for rich women to buy via the game show and to start an "organic" family with.

On top of this series being contemporary not only based on its production date, but also on the fact that it presents the current time period as a dystopian era, Ready, Set, Love is also peculiar in terms of its genre hybridity. By fracturing the light-hearted tone of the series with the introduction of the despotic systems and the dystopian storyline, the (real-life) problems presented stand out more than they would in an obviously unfair fictional world such as Collins's Panem or the dystopian South Korea of Squid Game. Nevertheless, the issues of commodification and biopolitics can be examined in these and a variety of other contemporary dystopian or related works, including Black Mirror (2016–present, created by Charlie Brooker), Uglies (2024, directed by McG, an adaptation of

a Scott Westerfeld novel), or the science-fiction black comedy Mickey 17 (2025, directed by Bong Joon Ho). Analyses of these themes would enrich the research of science fiction and literature in general, whereas the conclusions about human identity, bodily autonomy, Othered sexualities, and the market value of humans and within reality television would be applicable in fields such as philosophy, gender studies, and economics. Of course, while this article has provided a framework of commodification as seen in Ready, Set, Love, the discussed themes are not the only ones worth exploring. For instance, other researchers might expand upon Paper's homosexual identity to examine gender politics in dystopian worlds and how they reflect our current ones. The series could be approached intertextually to explore the influence of other pop-culture staples, such as Squid Game, or to ponder the show's iteration of the "Hansel and Gretel" fairy tale.

The possible topics for further research include the motive, organization, and actions of the resistance movement in Ready, Set, Love. While this paper has briefly touched upon it, more in-depth examination would cast light on the sociology of power dynamics within the show. In the context of this article, however, it is significant to recall that the issues and injustices remain unresolved at the end of the season. While the protagonists escape the game and The Farm, and even the producer, Jenny, abandons her position to live beyond the wall with her wife and future son ("Say I Do" 01:02:05), the freedom they achieve is their own, individual one. They have failed to reform society. The epilogue, set four years later, hints at the potential continuation of the story and a new season that would tackle the problem of freeing all the other oppressed individuals. Yet it points out that the dating show will be continued and that Eve Mart is still in charge. In this, the show underlines that a handful of dissidents are not enough to bring down an oppressive regime. As long as the status quo remains unchallenged by the masses, people will be commodified and used for commercial and biopolitical profit.

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[1] However, as Stock ascertains, "[a]ccepting dystopian negativity to understand the structural inequalities of past and present does not foreclose the possibility of utopian hope, but rather demands that hope is utopian" (15). If the negativity presented in Ready, Set, Love is ultimately unchallenged in the first season, the eventual continuation of the diegetic reality (the possibility of a sequel season) ensures that the hope for a better tomorrow remains active. After all, "[d]ystopias that leave no room for hope do in fact fail in their mission" of making people want to construct a better society (Vieira 17).

[2] Some authors see the ultrasound as a yet another way to commodify the fetus, as the process "personifies the 'cyborg fetus' through 'technological quickening'" (Mitchell and Georges qtd. in Sharp 317).

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