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Department of Communication, Media and Film

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By: Dustin Lo

Advisor: Dr. Tamara Shepherd

Program Coordinator: Dr. Tania Smith

**Title: “Quest for the Booty”: Vine Culture (MAGCON) and Neoliberal
Gendered Ideologies**

Abstract

This thesis will examine neoliberal gender identities in the MAGCON (Meet-and-Greet Convention) phenomenon, which originated on the social platform Vine. The research primarily focuses on Vines (six-second videos uploaded to Vine) produced by the leading figures in the group, Cameron Dallas and Nash Grier, who were once the most popular Vine personalities and authoritative figures to teenage audiences. Through the Circuit of Culture, I argue that MAGCON mediates normative, neoliberal gender performances to teenagers, particularly teen girls, with the help of the gazing effect and cultivation. MAGCON’s Circuit of Culture includes the production of Vines that demonstrate its ideals, and their consumption by audiences who are constructed by these ideals. MAGCON cultivates a balance between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities within its ideal male image, while promoting a mixture of the “cool girl,” commodity feminism and neoliberal feminism within its ideal girl image. MAGCON regulates the norms to specific audiences through an authoritative “family” image, and elaborates its notions on ideals through dynamic representations, performances, and audience feedback. This thesis presents MAGCON as a case example of the consumerist, disposable nature of neoliberal teen culture.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The Circuit of Culture

Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Madsen, MacKay and Negus (2013) propose that one must examine a media object as a “Circuit of Culture” (p. 1), in order to understand it. Production, representation, consumption, identity, and regulation are the five components that form the circuit, in which the modification of any one element changes the outcome of all. In other words, the circuit model suggests that the five factors are mutually constitutive. The production of media texts involves representational practices regulated according to social and legal norms and consumed by audiences in ways that shape cultural identities, which themselves then feed back into production. The circulation of mediated culture grows even more rapid given the recent emergence of participatory culture, with the increasing amount of online community-based communications, user-generated content (production), and potential for identity shaping (Van Dijck, 2013, pp. 158-159). Media representations travel faster and to a more diverse set of audiences than ever.

Youths and young adults are the most creative and active contributors in participatory culture, as evidenced by their superior population across social media platforms that foster participatory culture (Pew Research Center, 2017). They have formed their own “circuits” distinct from those of past generations, via different artifacts and life experiences. In society at large, however, the biggest cultural circuit is mostly formed by mainstream (adult) beliefs, which impacts all the other circuits including youth culture. Younger generations are therefore battling with adults in identity shaping, as they develop distinct values that often challenge the social mainstream (Hebdige, 1979, p. 96; quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 84).

Meanwhile, to try to bring younger generations into the fold of mainstream culture as a coveted target market, adult producers work to repackage mainstream ideals in the youth culture, by using teenagers as transmitters, and fitting cultural products into youths' social experiences. Pop, teenage-idol groups managed by adults offer a prime example of this, as groups such as One Direction and MAGCON can produce mainstream yet teen-related products. They help signify mainstream beliefs and behaviours according to a desired and preferred lifestyle, and persuade teenagers to follow suit. The cultural status of "mainstream", including an "ideal" gender identity for the mass public, has become a huge battlefield between generations in popular culture (Hebdige, 1979, p.96; quoted in Storey, 2012, p.84).

The underlying mainstream political-economic climate in the US since the Reagan administration has been termed neoliberalism (McCullough, 2010, p. 206). Neoliberalism emphasizes limited government, individual opportunities, and the use of the free market economy to determine social norms (Alexander, 2003, p. 550; Crawshaw, 2007, pp. 1606, 1614; Keller, 2014, p. 149; Mendes, 2012, p. 557), and has shaped the current cultural climate. Neoliberal individualism aligns with the way that participatory culture has fostered online platforms that gather user-generated content, such as YouTube, for individuals to "broadcast themselves" publicly and earn social feedback (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 116). Building from YouTube's popularization of user-generated audio-visual content, a number of more recent platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Vine have made it even easier for users to engage in self-broadcasting. This thesis focuses on Vine, launched in early 2013, which allows individuals to upload six-second videos. Vine's affordances encourage users to convey their messages quickly, using exaggerated visual gags and concise musical or oratory audio. The promise of

Vine is that it enables any user to potentially become famous by appealing to a mass audience and earning significant “followers” through their Vines.

MAGCON

MAGCON (short for Meet-and-Greet Convention) is a teenage idol group consisted of a 12-person group of American Vine personalities between 2013 and 2014: Cameron Dallas; Nash Grier and his brother Hayes Grier; Matthew Espinosa; Jack Gilinsky; Jack Johnson; Aaron Carpenter; Taylor Caniff; Shawn Mendes; Jacob Whitesides; Carter Reynolds; and Mahogany Lox (Horan, 2014, para. 3). MAGCON was formed by Bart Bordelon in 2013, and was managed by Chad Grier (the father of the Grier brothers), Alan Spiegel and Steven Spiegel from 26MGMT (26MGMT Info, 2014 ; Horan, 2014, para. 2). While all of the MAGCON members had gained over a million “followers” in Vine, all but one of them are male teenagers who are less than 20 years old (at 2013). Cameron Dallas and Nash Grier were among the most popular personalities on Vine, with 25 million followers combined (Statista, 2016). They attract an audience composed primarily of teenage girls through “fun” and “attention seeking” approaches (Bosker, 2014, para. 34), and the construction of a “family” image (Evans, 2014, para. 4).

Fans support MAGCON by following its accounts on various social platforms and by interacting with the group’s products. Fans appear to gain and express their pleasure through fantasizing relationships with the members of the group, through feedback such as “I love you Cam!” under comment sections of their productions (Dallas, 2015). They also attend live MAGCON events, where they are invited to fulfill such fantasy through physical intimacies.

The Purpose of Research and The Points of Interest

My main research question is: How do Vine celebrities, especially MAGCON members, foster mainstream gendered values to teenagers within a neoliberal context? To be more specific, what

is the fuel behind the MAGCON phenomenon? What does MAGCON want to achieve? Moreover, how does MAGCON and the mass perceive ideal gender identities?

I propose that the Circuit of Culture may help to explain the mechanism behind MAGCON culture. Producers and actors of MAGCON transmit designated values through the production of Vines, which are consumed by followers (a.k.a. fans) who are appealed by the actors. Simultaneously, producers try to shape group members' identity through an emphasis on particular gender norms that serve to regulate members' self-representations via an authoritarian image (a.k.a. the "family" image). Producers also encourage fans to express their subscription to the gender ideals and signify their loyalty through consumption practices articulated as online and in-person feedback.

What is significant about this research is its detailed analysis of how the Circuit of Culture works to reinforce certain gender norms through a phenomenon designed explicitly to target teenage girls. I shall therefore conduct a textual and visual analysis of the MAGCON phenomenon through its Vine videos (Vines), looking specifically at themes employed in their production and the ways that they construct ideal fan consumption. Using the Circuit of Culture as the theoretical framework, I will identify and analyse gender performances and identities in MAGCON with the aid of post-feminist critiques, psychoanalysis and cultivation theory. In the following chapters, I shall first address the context for the study through a Literature Review, then explain the Circuit of Culture, cultivation theory and psychoanalysis in the Theoretical Framework section, and then detail the methods used for the study in the Methodology section. Once this groundwork has been covered, my analysis will address how the content and style of MAGCON Vines shape production and consumption within MAGCON's Circuit of Culture.

Chapter II: Literature Review: The Cultural Phenomena under Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism: The Current Dominant Social Ideology in America

Neoliberalism is a socio-political concept that originates from Hayek's (1944) spin on Berlin's (1969) "negative liberty", that people's liberation from the government or collectivism, a.k.a. the embracement of individualization, "is the only progressive policy" (quoted in McCullough, 2010, pp. 206; 208). Harvey (2005) summarizes the government's duty under neoliberalism as "to 'privatize' humans by limiting state protection to basic properties such as education, social security and land" (quoted in Thorsen & Lie, 2007, p. 11). This causes social forces to dictate consumer demand and dominant cultural assumptions and ideologies, with little government interference (Ouellette, 2015, p. 543). Self-regulation has become the emphasis of democracy under neoliberalism, which marginalizes minorities under the system.

Through a cultural lens, neoliberalism can be seen as "a collection of ideas which emphasizes money, empowerment, personal improvements and choices" (Rodierand & Meagher, 2014, p. 183; Keller, 2014, p. 149). Neoliberalism's sustenance corresponds with the prevalence of a free market economy under capitalism, in which "free market" signals efficient production and by corollary "the most efficient" social life (Ouellette, 2015, p. 545). Neoliberalism also co-articulates with democracy as the core foundation of Western politics, specifically in its emphasis on freedom of expression and freedom of choice that frees one's desire to achieve optimum success (Ouellette, 2015, p. 547). du Gay (1996) develops the idea of "personal entrepreneurship" (a.k.a. personal branding) to unfold the implications of neoliberalism's advancement in late capitalism (Quoted in Hearn, 2008, pp. 204-205). Under this notion, individuals explore themselves through individual decisions and aim to achieve positive recognition from society for self-promotion of an "ideal" life. Since favourable norms governing

such an ideal are socially constructed, one's freedom comes with an opportunity cost of potential failure in society (a.k.a. deviance) and its respective punishment. Rose (2015) aids Hearn's point by contending that neoliberalism involves "cultural training," which simultaneously shifts responsibility onto individuals and offers them "free choice" for "maximum pleasure" defined by the society (quoted in Ouellette, 2015, p. 547).

Cultural Phenomena under Neoliberalism

Authors have pointed out that under a neoliberal ideology, people, especially men, are designated as "elite" rational thinkers (Gilbert, 2013, p. 21), and are primarily responsible for their own well-being (Crawshaw, 2007, p. 1606). Such an appeal to rationality evokes cost minimization and profit maximization in economics, and is crucial for neoliberal decision making as it frames the individual as a rational actor. The implications of this view is that individualization has resulted in achieved equality, that "inequalities" do not exist in a society in the "post-identity" era (Keller, 2014, p. 149). As a result, fundamental social problems are internalized, become mainstream norms, and are harder to critique (Rottenberg, 2013, pp. 2, 15). Ouellette (2015) further notes the consequences on personal failures, that the society as an eyewitness will blame the "failed" persons, (e.g. welfare receivers) brutally for their "own fault" of disobeying social (a.k.a. efficient) norms (p.551). *Judge Judy* demonstrates this point well, which the host Judy Sheindlin pan "failed" persons harshly under a courtroom staging, implying the authoritative judging role of the society, derived by the minimum government (Ouellette, 2015, p.546).

Socially, the phenomenon of the "social factory" conveys how cultural subjectivity under neoliberalism demands that people produce products marked with individuality, but within the constraints of accepted social values (Hearn, 2008, pp. 204). People under neoliberalism are trapped in a "market" that is constantly exchanging constructed correct (dominant) social values,

and are constantly judged interpersonally by comparisons between “authentic” selves. To complicate matters, the objectives of competition and respective consumption behaviours is flexible, which Hearn (2008) identifies as the result of constant new knowledge (p. 202).

Impacts Brought by Neoliberalism

Commodification

Commodification in culture is the process by which objects and behaviours become rendered as goods and services with exchange values, caused by human consumption (Cole, 2007, pp. 944-945). In social media, people attempt to highlight their value and sharpen their brand through constant performances and a complex calculation of opportunity costs. The self gets rendered through consumption and performance, where individuals become constant actors who rebrand themselves for the evaluation of others (Hearn, 2008, p.205 ; Peters, 1997, p.83; Quoted in Hearn, p.205). Under the influence of the “social factory” (Hearn, 2008, p. 204), branded selves seek to satisfy market demand for value, by commodifying themselves as products. The way that this commodification of the self typically occurs in social media, characterized by rapid communication and a large volume of information, is that feelings and emotional appeals are the greatest sales pitches (Jhally, 2015, p. 250). The simplification of judgement that goes along with these emotional appeals means that appearance and performance become the key cues for self-branding. As such, “success” is determined by the effectiveness of the self-brand to serve as a commodity, to be consumed in the marketplace.

Consumerism and Hegemony

Consumption is an organic phenomenon in neoliberalism, as an open market implies the actions of buying and selling objects. Lupton (1994) approaches this issue from a producer’s perspective.

Looking at the appeals in advertisements, she finds that people are motivated to consume a product when they are attracted to its symbolic meanings, rather than its actual functions (pp. 112-116). This means that consumption is an action that reflects and constructs one's lifestyle (through "choice" in neoliberal terminology). Jhally (2015) echoes Lupton and claims that images in adverts define "good" lives for consumers' self-validation (p. 248).

Consumerism is the macro scale of consumption that renders it into an ideology. Producers' promise to manifest one's better future is set as the prime emotional appeal behind consumption (Storey, 2012, p. 66). Consumerism interlinks with cultural hegemony, when the prevailing norms are homogenous in the market, under the scenario that one dominant class has the assets to mediate a mass of people towards common consensus (Storey, 2012, p.82; Gramsci, p.75, 2009; quoted in Storey, 2012, p.82). Boggs (1976) states that the mass media traditionally set up by the ruling class dictates consumption habits and directions (quoted in Lull, 2015, p. 39). As people buy a lifestyle from "unique" commodities that in fact represent a homogenous mainstream (Lull, 2015, p.40), the demand for the products becomes inelastic. The inelasticity of demand gives opportunities to the producers of commodities to raise their costs, especially when hegemonic values become so seemingly self-evident that they are the only non-deviant social options to choose from (Lull, 2015, p. 40).

Scholarly research has highlighted the unreasonable demands constructed by the dominant class to govern commercial consumption and moral performances. In the study of *Men's Health* magazines, Alexander (2003) notices that advertisements in the magazines often feature expensive products that claim to help achieve an appropriate "masculine" lifestyle (p.547), and the stories frequently persuade readers to acquire a "masculine" - shredded, lean and regulated physique (pp. 539,541,543), a.k.a. the "classical body" in Elliott's (2007) term (p.

140). In contrast, a fat, unregulated body contraries to the consumable “classical body”, so that people who attain it are condemned severely with warnings in *Men’s Health* (Alexander, p. 542), as these people display a symbol contrary to the hegemonic standard, perform contrary to the apparent “common sense”, and pay no effort to consume in such market. Eventually, as a classic Marxist belief hints, material production replaces intellectual production as the social focus, which intensifies hegemonic ideas by discouraging challenges and diminishing objections (Storey, 2012, p.61).

Criticisms on Literatures Regarding Neoliberalism

Scholars define and unfold neoliberalism and its social impacts well, that make the concept less ambiguous. Hearn’s (2008) “personal entrepreneurship” and “social factory” are useful for explaining the social climate, and foreshadow the occurrence of commodification, which the latter is crucial for understanding gender **performances**. While Hearn misses out the consequences of inconformity, Ouellette (2015) fulfills this hole by pointing out the negative social judgment faced by a deviant person, that people always have to be conscious to authorities under neoliberalism to avoid condemnation. Ouellette (2015) and Harvey (2005)’s notes on “free choice” imply that humans are rational beings, which legitimizes the above condemnation as humans have full control of themselves and surrounding objective factors, including commodification and consumption. Together with the “better future” rhetoric constructed for consumable goods under consumerism, these may help explaining the demand of MAGCON products and exploring the authoritative side of MAGCON.

These literatures however lack the explanation on the effects brought by the neoliberal social climate. Three potential effects brought by consumption/consumerism are increased disposability and quantification of human values, the emphasis on (commercial) values,

and given neoliberal culture's constant appetite for newness, the rise of competitiveness. Also, none challenge the faulty claim on "humans being rational human beings", as socio-psychologist Freud (2012) suggests, human actions are largely affected by the invisible unconscious, that desires and gut instincts (a.k.a. id) often dictate actions (Boyes, Comer, Gould, Ogden, 2012, p. 209). What is more, since one's control over the id differs fundamentally between people and affects the chance for one to act in deviance and commit crime (Martin, Sechres, and Redner, 1981; quoted in Linden, 2012, p. 287), the notion of "equal opportunity" becomes unfair, as humans actually have distinct abilities for (rational) decision making. As a result, I miss out the opportunity to address in this research, the possible reasons behind the short life (7 months) of MAGCON, as well as its definition on "equality" & its impacts to the audiences.

Fandom

Fandom is a community of human supporters towards a common brand (fans), with substantive knowledge towards the object (Jenkins, 1992; quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 228). From a producer's perspective, it is a supportive base, an indicator of success and a functional tool for the brand. Under neoliberalism, fans are assumed to subscribe to the brand for self-entrepreneurship and identity building.

Communications within a fandom involves upholding the brand and its values, via interactions between fans. Scholars have debated on the degree to which fans demonstrate a vulnerability to manipulation under capitalist culture. Critics within the Frankfurt School and other traditional Marxists have claimed that fans primarily enact conformity towards the bourgeoisie, hence fandom is a tool for capitalists' mass production. Scholars from the Frankfurt School, namely Adorno and Horkheimer, consider fandom as continuous subscription to hegemonic values in a "circle of manipulation," in which the audience are naïve dupes who are

trapped in a constructed reality (quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 64). Lowenthal (1961) further regards “culture” as a ruling class construction that serves the purpose of “standardizing, stereotyping, conserving and depoliticizing” the working class (quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 65). The fandom phenomenon results in endless mass exploitation, where, as claimed by Marx and Engels (1973), people rely on the material and intellectual products produced by the hegemonic ruling class for their own identity building (quoted in Storey, 2012, p.61).

Post-Marxist scholars express reservations about the framing of the audience as passive consumers of products devised by the dominant class. These scholars claim that audiences actively re-shape, if not work against, mainstream culture. For example, Hebdige (1979) regards youths as the counterforce of the hegemonic culture, who have the power to change social trends and dominant industries (quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 86). Hall (2009) declares the notion of the “passive” audience “unsocialist” and claims that the audience has the right to create a new culture by its own (quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 91). Despite their agreement on the Marxist conception that the working class endures struggle in the battle of meaning making presided over by the ruling classes (Storey, 2012, p. 90), they believe that the audience can exert counter-hegemonic pressure on mainstream values.

Gender Roles under Neoliberalism: Post-feminism & The “New Man”

Post-feminism

Post-feminism is a social response to the feminist movement which re-evaluates women’s social power and the need for further activism. It emphasizes the “pastness” of feminism, that women have acquired the freedom and power to subscribe to whichever lifestyles and ideologies they choose, hence the name “girl power” (Petersen, 2015, pp. 343). It assumes that women have found a regular route for personal empowerment from previous feminist movements (hooks,

2000, p. 114), which is proven by “feminist success”: the uprising of a “privileged” class of women. Examples of “feminist success” include constructed successful female images like young, academically-gifted women (McRobbie, 2004, p. 257), and powerful celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey (Collins, 2005, p. 143) and Tyra Banks (Keller, 2014, p. 149, 152). By summing up texts from Keller (2014), McRobbie (2004, pp. 255-257) and Jackson & Lyons (2013, p. 228), one common major characteristic of post-feminism is that women gain power by acting femininely under current morality, as regulated by market demand. The prevalence of “girl power” signals the denial of structural inequalities.

Keller (2014) summarizes how post-feminism emerges from a paradox about women in neoliberalism, in which “women are encouraged to act as individual as men, but sustain femininity for men’s consumption” (p. 149). Gill (2008) interprets post-feminism by posing the term “modernising femininity,” which suggests that women persuaded by the “pleasing oneself” rhetoric enact a modernized version of traditional femininity (p. 439).

Commodity Feminism

Post-feminism paves way to commodity feminism, which mediates the ways women find pleasure from their bodily appearance. Commodity feminism codes traditional femininity as female life goals, where women are persuaded to gain individuality and independence through sexual attractiveness as determined by men (Gill, 2015, pp. 279, 281). Women gain pleasure through sexual satisfaction under this notion, which defuses their threat to men’s social status. Practically speaking, they have the choice to please themselves through narcissistic “modelling for men” and “dress-up for good appearance” (Gill, 2015, pp. 282-283). As a result, women are expected to remain satisfied with the current systematic suppression caused by male-dominated norms, and not to challenge discriminatory gender roles and performances.

Neoliberal Feminism

Neoliberal feminism is another version of post-feminism coined by Rottenberg (2013), who asserts that post-feminism “offers no critique to neoliberalism” and “mobilizes systemic gendered inequalities into personal matters” (pp. 2-3). Neoliberal feminism internalizes women’s systemic disadvantage by naturalizing traditional feminine traits for their socialization (Keller, 2014, pp. 149, 155), and fuses the notion of “girl power” and extreme rationality, so that women are conditioned to desire individual, professional goals while maintaining their “market value” by following male-dominated norms of appearance and behaviour (Rottenberg, 2013, pp. 437-439). One celebrity that enacts these notions is Tyra Banks, who founded a Beauty Inside Out campaign that promotes her own brand of cosmetic products which claimed to make one look “fiercely real (authentic)”, yet stressed the importance of make-up for work and school (Keller, 2014, pp.154-155). Significant figures like Banks justify social bias and shifts the structural unfairness to individuals.

Neoliberal Masculinity: the “New Man” and the “New Lad”

The image of masculinity under neoliberalism has been heterogeneous and parallel to post-feminism. Men in neoliberal societies re-adjust their image and appeal through various approaches, especially when they have developed an option to distinct oneself from traditional masculinity (Gill ,2003, p.42). Nonetheless, men make a choice on image to please others, as similar to post-feminist women. Under neoliberalism, men are required to balance characteristics between “new man” and “new lad” for their own appeals. As characterized by Gill (2003), the “new man” emphasizes the “whole person” and “style”, that a man whole adapts such prototype tempts to appeal to all parties visually via ignoring their sexual (male) identity, forming good communications with others, and becoming objects of desire like (traditional) women(pp. 43, 46).

In contrary, the “new lad” imagery promotes traditional masculine characteristics, that men should be controlling the cultural order, dominating women through sex, and re-enforcing aggressiveness in competitions, such as in football consumption (pp. 48, 50,52).

In practice, men retain some masculine traditions, while adding in some softer sides to showcase intelligence, in order to increase their attractiveness. Under neoliberalism, men are expected to be gentle and caring (Fullick, 2014, p. 550), on top of displaying intelligence and physical strength - the two major masculine traits (Jagger, 1998, quoted in Fullick, 2014, p. 549). Masculine traditions retained include men subscribing to competitive sports to symbolize activeness (Fullick, 2014, p. 557). Alexander (2003) also observes the frequent mentions of sex in the front cover messages of *Men’s Health* (70% of the time between December 1997 and December 2001) and the claim that building a hard body is the prerequisite for unleashing “dynamic” (heterosexual) sex (p. 543). Framed through the neoliberal logic of competition, however, these traditional masculine qualities must be matched with softer elements such as a “great sense of humor,” “intellectual maturity” and “honesty” (Fullick, 2014, p. 555), to meet the neoliberal ideal for contemporary masculinity.

Criticisms on Literatures Regarding Neoliberal Gender Identities

Scholars hit the normative gendered identities under neoliberalism thoroughly with ample demonstrations. Gill (2008) and other scholars such as Tasker & Negra (2007) coordinate post-feminism as “modernization” of traditional femininity, which sets a solid premise on evaluating neoliberal feminine activities. Keller (2014) addresses the crucial essence of post-feminist gender performances as to make oneself sellable for others’ consumption, which can help understanding the relationship between the gendered ideals raised by MAGCON and the ones existed in mainstream world. Gill (2003, 2008) evaluates the values of mainstream gendered identities in-

depth, and how they act as responses to the neoliberal consumerist world. The two common elements between commodity feminism and “new” masculinities (man & lad) are that they are made for one's appeal to the mainstream, homogenous mass, and they turn the body to the center of attention and appeal. These are important for studying MAGCON’s gendered messages and the reasons behind its popularity.

The major lack in the literatures is the consideration of other social responses towards feminism, such as anti-feminism. Out of all the scholars reviewed, only Gill (2003) touched on this ideology lightly when addressing “new lad”. However, none compares the popularity and evaluates the relationship between anti-feminism and post-feminism, that the former seemingly lacks mainstream support, as seen in sports consumption (Gill, 2003, p.52). It is understood that the “success” of feminist movements causes post-feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p.1, quoted in Petersen, 2015, pp.343), but none addresses why the society replies to feminism with post-feminism in particular. This limitation restricts the scope on examining MAGON’s gendered ideologies, that its potential anti-feminist traits might be overlooked.

Chapter III: Framework and Theories: The Circuit of Culture and Highlights in Psychoanalysis

The Theoretical Framework of Research: The Circuit of Culture

The Circuit of Culture by du Gay and Hall (1997) is a theoretical framework which investigates the production and re-production of representation and meaning. It originated from Hall's encoding/decoding model in 1973 and its evolution in 1986 by Johnson. The Circuit of Culture highlights the importance of the interactivity between different producers of meaning, and negates them as discrete subjects. It shows the convection of one's experiences and the underlying abstract meanings, that each component continuously provides new raw materials for other components for new intellectual productions.

Du Gay and Hall's Circuit of Culture (1997) focuses on the interaction between thoughts (as processes), symbols for representation of meaning, as well as the social culture. It consists of five interactive components: representation, consumption, production, regulation and identity (Leve, 2012, p. 4 , see figure 1).

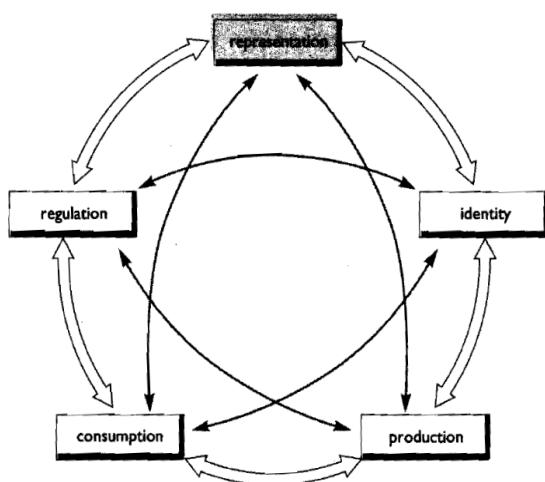


Figure 1. Circuit of Culture. (Hall, 1997)

Hall (1997) regards a system for representation as a prerequisite of interaction, in which a culture can only be formed when people in a community use a common language to portray objects (pp. 17-18). Under a consumerist society in neoliberalism, fame and capital/money are representational symbols of success, and the acts of purchasing and consumption reinforce this representation (Alexander, 2003, pp. 547, 551).

Leve (2012) provides insights of Circuit of Culture by interpreting the hierarchy between the components. He quoted Denzin's (2001) work that says production pre-sets the direction for meaning making and taking, that consumers in the market will then "buy" the products under this hegemonic setting (quoted in Leve, p. 7). Identification comes after consumption and production in terms of meaning making (Leve, 2012, p. 8), where people construct their symbols to represent who they are, and what notions they want to portray, presented through the consumption of products. Regulation is then positioned as the mechanism that mediates people towards a common consensus.

Scholars have developed subsequent criticisms of the model. First, despite its functions, the components used are considered arbitrary. Economic theorist Fine (2002) argues that the terms are not specific enough to denote the practical actions done by people for meaning making, such as advertising and marketing (quoted in Leve, 2012, p. 4). Second, Fine (2002) claims that du Gay and Hall do not identify the hierarchy between the five elements, that it is more suitable to be named "circulation of commodities," as it is strong for examining individual cultural elements, instead of a full picture (quoted in Leve, 2012, p. 4).

Despite the criticisms, the Circuit of Culture is a suitable framework for investigating neoliberal gender identities under the MAGCON culture, due to its emphasis on interactivity. It is a complex communication system that includes simultaneous interactions between multiple

stakeholders: the production front simultaneously produces agenda-charged products which are potential signifiers of mainstream norms, and persuades audience to subscribe to the products for an “ideal” identity; people who consume them simultaneously perceive representational knowledge and shape identities for themselves via signification, producing feedback to provide new information on “ideal” production. For this reason, it is superior to utilize it than some one-way communication models, such as the Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication, which claims a source’s meaning is constructed by a transmitter then linearly transferred to a receiver (Wood, 2004, p. 33). What is more, a linear model fails to fit the way that MAGCON’s communication is located within its own culture as a loop of production and consumption. In terms of understanding MAGCON culture, the elaborations of mainstream norms and the derived performances within the MAGCON circle indeed are what matter the most.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation in media studies is a notion raised by Gerbner (1979) that television as a popular medium can sharpen and homogenize audience’s perceived “social reality” constructed by the production front (p. 14), via visuals common to a mass public. This phenomenon blurs the distinction between the objectively real world and the artificially constructed “reality,” that provides opportunities for mass production. It is done through the processes of mainstreaming and resonance.

Cultivation works by producers penetrating messages in the mass culture. Gerbner (1998) notes that cultivation implies a non-linear process. The audience first accepts certain “truths” from television, presumably through their continuous exposure to them (p.185), while producers aim to create a collective set of common norms among the heterogeneous audience via homogenous information via the mainstreaming effect from TV production (p.

184). Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli (1979) define mainstreaming as the “construction of commonality and diminishing divergences among heavy viewers,” in which the population who has less education and income, hence critical thinking skills, is more likely to fall into the “heavy” category (p. 15). Gerbner (1998) later demonstrates the models of mainstreaming (see Figure 2 below), and states that their common ultimate goal is to let people to absorb the dominant set of beliefs (p. 184).

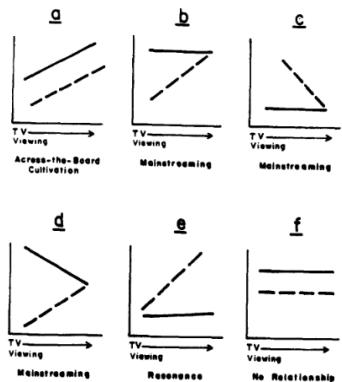


Figure 2. Models of Cultivation (Gerbner, 1998)

Resonance is the activation of one's self-fulfillment prophecy through images from television. In Gerbner et al.'s (1979) framework, when people learn something repetitively from television and experience the same in real life, they tend to trust the portrayed “reality” more (p. 15). Stereotypes build up on the norms constructed by the collectively perceived acts. Having little interference also increases the effectiveness of resonance, as there is less disturbance to the prevailing mediation (Gerbner et al., 1979, p. 16).

Scholars have criticized cultivation theory for its limited scope. Potter (2014) argues that the research solely focuses on prime-time television shows without considering other components that make up the time-slot, such as advertisements and news (p. 1025). Morgan, Shanahan & Signorielli (2015) add that the original research team have inadequate data on the audience's actions and activeness behind the television screen (p. 692), meaning that their ability

to analyze TV viewers' thought processes is vague and incomplete, making statements such as "heavy viewers" meaningless. The initial research by Gerbner et al. (1979) is also criticizes on the ignorance toward people's perceived understandings of knowledge prior to television watching. Morgan et al. (2015) claim that the audience may unpack the term "violence" distinctively, which opposes Gerbner's assumption on the pre-existing general (common) knowledge that audience members have established (pp. 683, 684).

However, scholars do not suspect the applicability of cultivation theory to the era of new media. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) note that the focus of the effects of mass storytelling in cultivation theory are generally applicable to other public media (p. 350). In terms of platforms, new media such as social media fosters cultivation as they record and gather one's past interests and perceived images (Morgan et al., 2015, p .688).

Cultivation theory helps to explain MAGCON's prevalence among a specific age group. MAGCON positions itself as part of the mainstream culture which uses visual performances to construct a "reality" for teen girls. Given that the definition of "teenagers" is people between 13-19 years old, as the word "teen-age" suggests (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.), most people in the fandom have possibly not graduated from high school, meaning they have a relatively low intellectual level, hence according to Gerbner (1998), they are easier to be cultivated. Mainstreaming and resonance may potentially occur with more effectiveness among a younger age group, that may be crucial to understand MAGCON's success.

Psychoanalysis: Fantasy and Gazing from Women

Humans are born with unlimited desires and wants (Storey, 2012, p. 110) which are recognizable through language (Mulvey, 2003, p. 137). In a given culture, consumers will naturally demand

products that suit their desires to be produced to the market, in attempts to fulfill themselves, although they will never succeed due to unlimited and flexible unconscious wants (Lacan, 1989 ; quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 103). Sexual desire is an effective, unconscious tool for producers to potentially manipulate on, as one's unconscious is fundamentally motivated to seek for sexual opportunities for reproducing one's own genes (Dickerson, 2012, p.77). Gazing and fantasy are unconscious actions for one to fulfill wants.

Gazing

Gazing is the act of one's visual examination towards others' body. Its first function is to fulfill the unconscious pleasure from looking, originated from pre-genital eroticism and curiosuty (Mulvey, 2003, p.135). According to Dickerson (2012), in an episode of sex, females "demand strong general preferences for male targets who look confident, seductive, well-groomed and toned" (Dickerson, 2012, p.86), implied that they may get more pleasure when they witness one of them. The second function of gazing is to help females to construct their erotic identities through contacts to male imageries (Mulvey, 2003, p.136). Under a patriarchal society, females are both biologically and socially passive, due to the absence of penis (Mulvey, 2003, p.133). The feeling of the "possession of penis" (Mulvey, 2003, p.135) is a symbol of successful sexual attraction (Mulvey, 2003, p.134), that a woman feels empowered when an ideal male figure builds visual connections to her, either physically or virtually. A cinema setting demonstrates the mechanism of empowerment, that the stares from the (male) actors or erotic speeches delivered can trigger women's gazing, unconscious excitement and appeal to the men.

Fantasy

Fantasy is a man-made imaginary state where one's current desires and maximum pleasure are fulfilled. To make it happen, a person will first identify an "ideal" subject through knowledge and symbols, and then build up desires towards the goal (Storey, 2012, p. 110).

Pleasure occurs when one foresees its occurrence (Cowie, 1984, p. 80, quoted in Petersen, 2015, p. 345), and is dismantled either due to the change of desires or the dispossession of the state.

People are always seeking opportunities to fulfill different fantasies, as the desired object demanded by this irresistible pleasure-seeking gut instinct is ever-changing, given our unlimited wants and ever-changing social norms.

Neoliberalism seemingly fosters the exploration of desires and fantasy, as it breaches traditional social constraints (e.g. traditional femininity and masculinity) and their "defaulted" desires. However, given the existence of social mainstream, a.k.a. the most prevailing set of norms in the market, one set of demands on fantasy stands out. Media attempts to captivate most people's desires for manipulation, while sustaining the rhetoric of neoliberal individuality. As seen in romance novels such as *Twilight*, media extracts the highest common factor of desires, such as first love experience, from the audience to produce consumable products (e.g., books) accessible across space and rules (Petersen, 2015, p. 349). Through the collective consumption of an imaginary ideal sexual state, producers may be able to steer the audiences toward a collective set of fantasies and construct an ideal gendered identity for women that embraces traditional femininity (Petersen, 2015, p. 347), which is possible through mainstreaming.

Chapter IV: Methodology

The central research question for this study is “How does MAGCON foster neoliberal gendered identities and performances?”. As a person who is athletic and considered deviant in popular culture, I formed this question based on both an accident and my initial interests on fitness communications, “mainstream” idol culture and gender roles. I spotted and “followed” Cameron Dallas’ Instagram account and thought he is a fitness personality, in which the pictures on the account brought me to the world of MAGCON.

The main objective of this research is to investigate how elements of mainstream culture are targeted toward teenagers via idols. There are two issues at stake in this investigation: 1) What are the norms and ideals that characterize mainstream culture?; 2) How is mainstream culture targeted toward teenagers specifically? If I had been conducting this study in 2014, for example, the research object would be either One Direction or Justin Bieber, who have sparked a global phenomenon thanks to their constructed idol image which attracts teenaged girls to their world. I decided to swap the research object to MAGCON in late 2015 due to my recognition of the new social media Vine, which provided a case study of how the platform was important to study as a site for teenage culture.

Vine stands out from other new platforms because the nature of its main function reflects the essence of neoliberalism even more so than Snapchat, LINE or Instagram. Vines are regarded as “snack contents” by a once-active user Nash Grier (Bosker, 2014, para. 9), in that they feature simple messages and cheap cost of production. The fact that Vine does not allow long titles and videos over six seconds long restrains sophisticated storylines, and instead encourages concise messages. This speeds up the flow of ideas, which fits into the competitive, always new nature of neoliberalism. This is unlike Instagram or Facebook, which allow people to elaborate on their

visuals via long blocks of text, or Snapchat which allows users to upload longer videos.

Meanwhile, like other platforms, Vine does not charge money from users, so that anyone can have access to and upload content freely. This in theory sets up an equal opportunity for users to earn public recognition and values that coincides with the neoliberal version of “equality.”

MAGCON members as a group is chosen out of the popular Vine personalities due to its similarity to One Direction and Justin Bieber, as well as its representativeness on Vine.

According to an online source, MAGCON started out as an anti-bullying campaign proposed by Bart Bordelon (Horan, 2014, para. 2), which famous Vine personalities consented with him to participate in it. However, judging by their Vines and fans’ comments, their general objective had become similar to other pop groups – to provide entertainment to teenagers of the opposite sex through constructions of imagined romantic relationships. They also share similar ethnic and gender backgrounds (consist of almost all white men) and similar age range (around 14-20 years old in 2013). All of the MAGCON members are well-known on Vines, especially the two primary personas in this research, Nash Grier and Cameron Dallas, who have the second and the sixth most popular accounts on the platform (Statista, 2016). Therefore, they may reflect the subscribed values of a popular mass, and how mainstream beliefs work out in Vine.

The research informally began when I looked up Dallas’s Instagram account – the platform where I first learned of his existence, in early 2015. My observation then expanded to his Snapchat and his base camp in Vine, and was followed by an investigation of Grier’s social media accounts later that year. The formal research procedure began when I first drafted the proposal for this project in January 2016, by which time I had come across and briefly analyzed the range of data below:

YouTube videos:

- Two compilation videos (MrDailyVine, 2015; funnyvines 2015, 2015) of 218 Vines made by Cameron Dallas (138) and Nash Grier (80) in 2013 and 2014. Seven of these are part of this research (see appendix I).
- Four video blogs regarding MAGCON tour experiences in Chicago (3/1/2014-3/2/2014, its 7th tour) and San Diego (3/15/2014 - 3/16/2014, its 8th tour) (see appendix II ; Horan, 2014, para. 2)
- The video *What Guys Look for in Girls* (and its comments)
(Uploader: CrazyBetch; Starring: Cameron Dallas, Nash Grier, and JC Caylen; Uploaded on 12/29/2013). *(note: it was a deleted video that was originally uploaded to JC Caylen's channel. YouTuber Crazybetch uploaded a backup of it to his channel.)

Contents outside YouTube:

- Videos uploaded to Cameron Dallas' Facebook fan page (and comments)

This set of data was chosen because it provides video documentation of the golden era of MAGCON. The timeframe between Q3 2013 and Q1 2014 was the time MAGCON produced the most on various platforms, so that the data available is the most concentrated. Compilation videos of Vines is more preferable than separate Vines for analysis because the former take less time to process, due to the interface differences between YouTube and Vine (the latter requires one to scroll up/down to access to each Vine video). The Facebook fan pages of MAGCON members not only compliment their Vines, but also allows more interactive communications than Vine,

such as replies on top of comments, that may drop more insights on their gender ideals via texts.

Textual analysis was the primary approach to examine neoliberal gender performances in the materials above. Visual analysis on the other hand was used to investigate Dallas's and Grier's settings, acts, tones, and facial expression in their Vines, which are important for qualitatively unpacking the producers' definitions on gendered identities, and use of symbols and symbolic acts. Textual analysis was adapted to examine speech in Vines and Video blogs, as well as texts in songs featured in the MAGCON tour, the *What Guys Look for in Girls* video, and all the comment sections related to the research.

Psychoanalysis, cultivation theories and gendered theories were perspectives mobilized to study the MAGCON phenomenon. Psychoanalysis aided inspection on how the contents appeal to the specific audience group; Cultivation theories assisted investigation on the construction of customized social norms; gendered theories helped the analysis on what and how gendered performances are labelled and displayed.

Textual and visual analysis have a comparative advantage than quantitative methods, e.g. content analysis and questionnaire, when dealing with a dynamic object that is large in the volume of data and full of unstandardized, un-unified messages. Textual analysis has a more competitive edge than content analysis, as each source has unique materials, theme and use of words, implying the huge difficulty on summary. Content analysis as a quantitative method can only mediate myself to discover the themes and common cues used in MAGCON's Vine's, but not their definition on core ideologies (such as "ideal" masculinity and femininity) which are crucial to gendered identities and performances. Compared to questionnaires, textual analysis is superior in terms of freedom and efficiency. The design of questionnaires tend to over-generalize data by limiting answers, especially in multiple choice or rating-type questions. It works against psychoanalysis as over-generalization leads to bias of ideas, brought by my own

interpretations to words. Questionnaires as a method also forces one to wait for it, which reduces the efficiency on data processing. Compared to interviews, textual analysis is again superior in efficiency, as the former creates a waiting period between the start of research and the date of interview. Interviews' second weak spot is its uncontrollability. Should I conduct any interviews, any proposed interviewee has the right to refuse to participate in them, if I propose questions that they feel uncomfortable to answer. This spikes up the difficulty on getting successful interviews hence sufficient data.

Textual analysis however limits the data available regarding fans' reasons for subscribing to MAGCON. Fans' actual motive in consumption is harder to reach by textual analysis than interviews as they can easily stage their thoughts in their videos. There are fundamental differences between scripted and a live setting, which unconscious acts such as Freudian slip (Boyes, Comer, Gould, Ogden, 2012, p. 209) are more likely to happen in the latter scenario. Also, despite the way that video blogs seemingly feature personalities casually speaking their minds, it is less authentic than live interviews as their speeches can be edited. Questionnaires could have helped discovering the scale and range of emotion felt by MAGCON fans, as well as their perception of the Vines.

Chapter V: Analysis: the “Quest for the Booty” and the Request of Cool Girls

Production and Representation of the MAGCON Branded through Vines

Vine production promotes MAGCON’s ideas and transmits the brand’s image to the public. MAGCON as a profit-seeking endeavour cashes in from the audience by cultivating ideal gendered images that target teenagers. MAGCON production involves performances of a specific idealized masculinity designed to appeal to teenage girls and discipline their fantasies. This is done through Vine, where active users seek attention via numerous strategies, namely a clear theme, precise performances and careful planning, to deliver their own agendas within six-second videos. MAGCON members, such as the foci of this thesis Cameron Dallas and Nash Grier, have won millions of followers through distinctive themes, and staged and often exaggerated performances, which portray dynamic images of “perfect” teenage boys who are consumable for their heterosexual counterparts. Three major themes are apparent in their Vines – “fun”, “sexiness” and “rebellion” – as observed and categorized qualitatively. These themes represent the constructed ideal for teenage boys, as targeted toward their teenaged girl fans.

Themes in the Vines

Fun

“Fun” in the sense of gendered experiences signifies activeness, adventure and freshness, and is the core essence of MAGCON’s Vine productions. Dallas and Grier can prove their masculinity by displaying physical ability and acting in deviance to show courage. Through the theme, they simultaneously reflect the traits of Gill’s (2003) “new man” prototype, in that they show their

activeness via intelligence and soft power, and her “new lad” prototype, via physical force and strong appearance.

Deviant acts performed in public expose their adventurous side, as they do not hesitate to show-off their willingness and fitness to interact in public for attraction. For instance, Dallas does somersaults to jump above several mattresses continuously inside a retail store in *Mattress Shopping* ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 4:54-5:00) to show off his fitness; in *When You See An Attractive Person* ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 12:22-12:28) he regards an Asian girl in public as “attractive person” and forcefully asks her phone number, despite she is constantly avoiding him (see Figure 3). In neoliberal terms, this version of “fun” shows that they dare to seek and take risks, which fits in the notion that men are natural “risk-takers” (Crawshaw, 2007, p. 1607), and favours the construction of a distinctly masculine image of success.



Figure 3. Dallas’ Take on the Girl. ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 12:25)

Sexiness

“Sexiness” can trigger unconscious attraction via the ideal physical masculine appearance. Dallas does not hesitate to display his body as a means to direct the audience’s gaze and sexual excitement. Being a former model, Dallas has trained to have a classical body: a fit, hard, muscular, and ready-for-manipulation body (Elliott, 2007, p. 140; Alexander, 2003, p. 544), with solid chest, biceps, and abs, as shown in *Vanity Teen* in 2013 (*Vanity Teen*, 2013). He is shirtless

in 24% of the Vines (33 out of 138) in the compilation video ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015). In some of these Vines, Dallas thanks or demands (female) fans' support, such as looking for "booties": the objectified term for women's rear ends in *My Quest for The Booty* ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 6:25-6:31). In it (see Figure 4 below), Dallas utilizes his shirtless appeal to seek sexual fulfilment, and articulate his own sexual desires to the audience. He signals his urgency with the use of a megaphone, a serious tone, and a worried facial expression.



Figure 4. Dallas looking for "booties" ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 6:28).

"Sexy" displays in Vines indicate how these productions shape fantasy, where teenaged girls who are attracted by Dallas's image are invited to "follow" him on Vine for additional representations of his body to consume. Ultimately, these constructed fantasies or engagement may motivate followers to desire to meet Dallas physically, when they demand upgraded intimacies beyond the Vines. This will eventually incentivize them to participate in MAGCON tours, where they can contact Dallas (and other MAGCON boys) in person.

Rebellion

"Rebellion" aids "sexiness" to mediate authentic relationships as represented in the Vines. MAGCON members use rebellion to sell their authentic sides to the fans by connecting to their lives. Both Dallas and Grier often use expressive facial expressions and exaggerated actions to convey distaste for elements of conventional teenaged life. For instance, regarding "dreadful" school life, Dallas made a Vine (*When I See School Stuff in Stores*) that stars him pulling off

shelved schoolbags and the “School” signboard in Walmart, while shouting “No! No! Why?!” ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 11:37-11:43). By rebelling against the adult-constructed lifestyle of back-to-school shopping, Dallas appears simultaneously playful and down-to-earth. Rebellion toward school is designed to mimic fans’ feelings in an exaggerated way. This theme and dynamic body language helps MAGCON members to portray themselves as normal teenagers who share similar lives, but stand out from peers via staged disobedience.

Production Strategies in the Vines

MAGCON members try hard to overcome the time constraints of Vine videos. They are managed by the company 26MGMT, a talent management company which aims at optimizing celebrities’ performances to “enable them to become leaders in their fields” (26MGMT, n.d.). 26MGMT and MAGCON make use of exaggerated, staged, and compacted performances, as well as precise editing, in order to convey themes concisely.

Exaggeration and Staging

Exaggerated acting is frequently used in both Grier’s and Dallas’s Vines. The six-second limit of Vine provides little room for plot development and discourages complex ideas, which gives rise to simple acting-centered visuals. They function and create impacts similar to silent films, which audiences have to fulfill the missing parts (e.g. speeches) of the contents, hence to interact with them more thoroughly (Eyman, 2011, p. 173). Moreover, body language consists of 55% of messages in the entire communication system, while words only carry 10% (Mehrabian, 1971, p. 44, quoted in Fowles, 2011, p. 181). Given the directness and empirical nature of body language, exaggeration in performance can reaffirm central ideas and limit multiple interpretations. MAGCON idols apply exaggeration to Vines that portray everyday ideas. Aside

from *When I See School Stuff*, Grier points out in *Girls be like No Makeup Cake* what he wants to display at the start (girls' facial makeup), then immediately demonstrates the deviant procedure (dipping into the cake) and the result, without intermission (hilal duru, 2014, see Figure 5).



Figure 5. "Their makeup!" (hilal duru, 2014, 0:05)

Eventually, despite the fact that he says "their makeup" sarcastically to signal the end result, the attention lies on his messy face and the victory pose stereotypical to girls. It aims at conveying the message in the most simplistic way possible, through actions as opposed to words.

Staging can help remove uncertain outcomes in Vine performances. Vines' designated message and meaning may be lost if the producers fail to capture the intended outcomes. Vines from both Dallas and Grier that showcase their physical abilities reflect this technique well. The combination of actions in *When You Get into A Hotel* ([funny vines2015](#), 2015, 1:33-1:40) – taking a running start, doing a mid-air somersault, and then perfectly landing on the side of the bed – requires strategic planning and multiple rehearsals. Staging is more preferred than improvisation in these circumstances, since these Vines are intended to display different aspects of their masculinity. They do not allow themselves a failed shot, as it portrays a loser image in masculinity by its unsuccessful performance.

Compression

The compression of even shorter videos can compact multiple ideas into a six-second compilation and deliver a designated agenda more effectively. Cutting together several clips

within a Vine compresses many elements into one idea, one product. *Cool Stuff* by Grier ([funny vines2015](#), 2015, 2:09-2:15) consists of six separated videos, which show Grier defining “cool stuff”: wakeboarding with one hand, jumping on a trampoline from the roof of a house and skateboarding while holding the back of a moving pick-up truck. By providing multiple activities as proofs, Grier offers a more elaborated interpretation of masculinity, so that he can provide a richer image of his athleticism to the audience.

Regulation: The “Family” Image of MAGCON

MAGCON members seek to build relationships with their fans through Vines. They portray the masculinity of individual members within the larger context of the MAGCON “family,” an image cultivated through Vine productions. The Vines create incentives for fans to follow multiple MAGCON personalities, and further to attend in-person MAGCON tour events. Vine supports the family image through its architecture, where individual and group accounts can be made, and accounts are not ordered hierarchically, which coincide with the neoliberal notions of “individualization” and “equal opportunities” and support fans’ personal experiences of MAGCON. In MAGCON-fan relationships, there is equal emphasis on constructing fans as love interests as well as little sisters, drawing on the way that brotherhood marks the family dynamic.

Collectively, the MAGCON community forms a family relationship via millions of connections established on Vine. MAGCON thus exerts regulatory authority over its own fandom culture through the family image. According to Nussbaum (2010), family is a “non-voluntary social institution” and “one of the most significant areas where people pursue their conceptions” (quoted in McCullough, 2010, p. 243). Under this family structure, the MAGCON boys are male role-models who act alternately as boyfriends and big brothers, in both roles guiding teenaged girl fans toward the portrayed teenage heterosexual ideals. The characteristics

portrayed by MAGCON boys become mainstream standards through the family label, where fans who wish to join the family are compelled to take their fandom and the norms beyond the Vines and into live MAGCON tours.

MAGCON Tours and Its Features

A MAGCON tour is a step forward from Vines, and is the only guaranteed opportunity for MAGCON fans to “hang out” with their idols. It is generally a two-day event held in hotel or conventional centres, which stars most of the MAGCON members. In terms of events, it features a convention of musical performances lasted from mid-afternoon to mid-evening, followed by a VIP-exclusive photo section right after, on one day, so as the VIP-exclusive “hang out” sessions in the two mornings. It was first launched in September 28, 2013 in Houston, and the crew had travelled to 8 cities across U.S. as of April 2014 (Horan, 2014, para. 2). Each tour attracts thousands of mostly female fans who pursue their dream to meet their idols, possibly because they can see and engage with the idols for more time and depth.

The main function of the tour is to foster sexual and gendered intimacy, which they are hierarchized through two categories of tickets: non-VIP and VIP. A \$32 Non-VIP ticket gives consumers access to attend the major convention (Evans, 2014, para. 28.), which MAGCON boys perform on stage to showcase their talents and prove their value as portrayed in Vines. The Convention often features poorly-rehearsed performances, leaving room for MAGCON boys to invite random female fans to the stage (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Fan-Celeb Interactions. (Hails, 2014, 0:11)

Onstage, MAGCON reflects and elaborates previously-constructed norms on sexual behaviours, and fosters idol-fan interaction throughout the show. Musical performances, which are a major part of the program, are embedded with gendered messages of MAGCON's ideal. The original compositions from MAGCON members reiterate neoliberal masculine values. For instance, two MAGCON boys Jack Johnson and Jack Gilinsky (Jack & Jack) sang their own releases, *Distance* and *Flights*, during the Chicago convention (Emma, 2014; Sountris, 2014). Both songs portray the desire to sustain a privileged heterosexual relationship from a boy's perspective, who exercises "care" in dominating his female partner. The message is especially subtle in *Flights*: "Let you (girlfriend) shop in New York, drink in London, it's all the same girl" (AZAZ lyrics, n.d.). When the duo sing them live to the audience in the event, they substitute each fan girl present as the girl mentioned in the song.

Improvisations

Improvisations in MAGCON tours consist of physically skilled moves comparable to the ones recorded in MAGCON member's Vines. They aim at showcasing their fitness hence masculinity. Onstage, they often use peer pressure to force other members to conform and do the same move, which is common in everyday brotherhood or male friendship. In one situation in San Diego, Cameron Dallas hesitated to perform a mid-air somersault, despite the fact that a couple of members had done it (Huestis, 2014). Nash Grier claimed that he was "scared," and provoked the crowd to chant his name. Dallas ultimately executed it (see Figure 7), and was rewarded with fans' screaming (Huestis, 2014).



Figure 7. Dallas' Somersault (Dana Huestis, 2014, 4:17)

Improvisation therefore demonstrates the power of mainstreaming in cultivation of norms in a community, where “false” actions can be “corrected” according to market demand. In this case, Grier’s claim degrades Dallas on his physical incapability, while Dallas’s execution signals his eagerness to regain his masculine fitness and defuse his “failed” image. This particular interaction between the two further served to sustain MAGCON’s family image.

VIP Package Bonuses

MAGCON offers VIP tour tickets at \$150-\$160 for the ticket holder to acquire a guaranteed chance to contact the idols physically and individually (Evans, 2014, para. 28; Hails, 2014), which is also the ultimate MAGCON experience that fans can achieve. VIPs can enjoy a selfie session with MAGCON members after the convention. A VIP is permitted to physically contact, hug, and have a short dialogue with the idols (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. Fan’s Dream Came True. (Hails, 2014, 1:10)

The fans are generally impressed by their idols via the discoveries from their body senses. Hilarynicolee (2014) notes that Dallas is “beautiful” in person. Dana Huestis (2014) also regards Dallas as “the best hugger” and calls him a “perfect boyfriend.” VIPs can also acquire access to a room for a “hangout session” with all MAGCON boys privately for one hour. According to some narratives (Hails, 2014; Frausto, 2014), aside from extra selfie sessions, VIPs can enjoy a question and answer session with them, and have contact for longer intervals. Hails (2014) reported that she once sat on Dallas’s lap, and observed his “cute” giggles and smile.

The primary function of VIP sessions is to add authenticity to the MAGCON brand, which provides opportunities for MAGCON to further embed normative gender roles. The VIPs indeed help completing “the quest of the booty” mentioned in Dallas’s Vine (MrDailyVine, 2015, 6:25-6:32), since the fans spend money to consume the sexiness of the objects (MAGCON members) up close. The ideal gendered experience becomes an exclusive, valuable material for the VIPs’ own neoliberal entrepreneurship and personal branding. Selfies in this case serve as proof of their encounters with MAGCON members that can be mobilized across social media sites. VIP sessions also validate the boys’ ideal image as authentic, as the boys are not instructed to perform specific behaviours in the VIP sessions. These VIP sessions, on top of bringing in substantial revenue on the tour, enhance the boys’ credibility and expand the brand’s influence.

The Role of Consumption in MAGCON Fan Identities

Fans represent a distinct subset of the overall audience, and they play a key supporting role in the entertainment industry. According to Jenkins (1992), fans can “re-produce” and “re-read” knowledge of the programming (quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 229). In MAGCON, a fan is fully engaged with the knowledge of the MAGCON family by endorsing the portrayed image of the MAGCON boys, assimilating the messages to themselves, and expressing their fandom openly to boost the brand’s population. MAGCON promotes the three themes - “fun”, “rebellion” and “sexiness”, to attract girls , and further suggests the directions for the audience to interpret the portrayed emotions and statements in Vines. Fans thus carry the potential to co-operate with MAGCON’s implied cultural system. In sum, MAGCON triggers fans’ initial interest via active performances and invitations toward echoes in life issues.

MAGCON mediates fan engagement effectively through Vines that resemble the lives of teenaged girl audience, such as those that portray shopping. In *When I See School Stuff in*

Stores, Dallas perceives mainstream school life as dreadful and exaggeratedly acts out his reactions ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 11:37-11:43). Here, the audience may be expected to agree with his perspective and be in sync with his mood, so that the fan may eventually identify school life as a dreadful experience as well. Acting is effective when it accurately reflects the extent the audience felt towards the labels. Dallas' yelling and maniacal treatment towards the schoolbags (see Figure 9) shows his absolute objection towards school and ideas associated, which may represent the audience's thought and gain its support, should the audience also perceive the extremity in reality.



Figure 9. Dallas Taking down the “School” Signboard. (Mr Dailyvine, 2015, 11:41)

The boys also constantly seek opportunities to reinforce their versions of masculinity and femininity. For example, Dallas demonstrates and sums up his interpretation of masculinity in *Mattress Shopping* ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 4:54-5:00), in which he showcases his fitness in public. The portrayed “new man” image in Gill’s (2003) perspective in the Vine equates to Dallas’ personal ideal of a man from the moment he decided to publish it, which the act of upload signifies his approval on the symbols used in productions for public judgment. For femininity, Grier presents an ironic take on wearing makeup by shoving a cake to his face in *Girls be like No Makeup Cake* (hilal duru, 2014). Dipping his face into the cake illustrates his dislike on the issue, that the negativity originates from its socially deviant nature. Both Dallas’

and Grier's Vines embrace individualism: the rebellion to tradition, that they encourage women to seek liberty from the dominant, mainstream gendered displays.

Furthermore, the Vines render a major association between the fans' desires and the boys' bodies. MAGCON Vines' cheap consumption cost (free, six seconds) fosters a sense of immediacy within fan fantasies. The Vines feature simple messages conveyed with instant access that play on simple appeals to teenaged sexuality. MAGCON members apply sexual cues in their Vines to trigger (female) fans' (hetero)sexual desires and attract them to its culture. Combined with the addictive nature of the Vines as "snack contents" (Bosker, 2014, para. 9), fans are impelled to consume many such videos. For instance, Dallas often appears shirtless, and accompanies the foregrounding of his body with words that signify romantic connections. In *The Quest for the Booty* ([MrDailyVine](#), 2015, 6:25-6:32), his shirtless appearance and the desire for a "booty" invite the fan to get involved in an "ideal" sexual intimacy. The Vine aims at triggering fans' sexual fantasies toward him, which coincides with Mulvey's (2003) notion of the gaze but inverted, where the male body is to be looked at.

The intended reaction from fans to such a video is evident in the comments section under the Vine. In *My Quest for the Booty* (Dallas, 2014), a significant number of fans reply with the heart-eyes emoji to display their sexual love and desire towards Dallas (Dallas, 2014). Hearts symbolize romantic love, which fits the implication of "the quest for the booty," that Dallas is demanding a partner for (hetero)sexual intimacy. Hearts also signal the fans' fantasies towards Dallas. This sort of feedback can serve the same function as peer influence, that it creates resonance across the fandom, cultivates a common mainstream (positive) view towards the brand, and increases the social legitimacy of the brand's values. Facebook comments show this phenomenon more clearly via the "like" system. Five out of the top six comments with the most

likes (over 10 each) under Dallas's Facebook video *Just Woke Up Bored* (which features him singing shirtless) display fans' (all girls) desire towards Dallas, with cues such as "Like this if you love Cameron Dallas" or similar (Dallas, 2015).

Through the comments sections on Vine videos, MAGCON members may further identify fans who are working toward their ideals and reward them with unique and intimate treatments. Through selective and strategic responses, MAGCON boys ultimately define the model fan feedback as responses which imitate an authentic heterosexual relationship based on MAGCON's ideals. The occasional replies from the MAGCON boys foster fans to take in the messages personally and engage in this virtual relationship more. Dallas replied to a fan comment that said "I need a Cameron Dallas in my life" (Dallas, 2015) on *Just Woke Up Bored* with "I'm already in your life" (Dallas, 2015. See Figure 10 below). His reply reassures the fan's position and ideal connection. Given his privileged position and image among fans, his reply demonstrates an ideal response. In this situation, "I need a Cameron Dallas in my life" signifies an ambition to own Dallas as a commodity. His reaction rewards this view, furthering a neoliberal version of the relationship between fan and idol.



Figure 10. Top Comments and a Screenshot of *Just Woke Up Bored* (Dallas, 2015, 0:01)

MAGCON's Ideal Girl Identity

Cameron Dallas and Nash Grier define and elaborate the image of an “ideal girl” when they appeared to be guests in JC Caylen’s (an online personality) YouTube video *What Guys Look for in Girls* (see Figure 11), in which they list out their appreciated and appalled characteristics on girls, indicated by quotes “I find girls attractive when...” or “I like girls when” (Crazybetch, 2013, 0:10, 3:45).



Figure 11. Setup in *What Guys Look for in Girls*. (From Left to Right : JC Caylen, Nash Grier, Cameron Dallas. Crazybetch, 2013, 0:01)

The MAGCON boys’ ideal girl is empowered with a certain degree of “equality” offered by men, that she can act like a man with men’s appreciation under certain circumstances. As with commodity feminism, despite men’s claim that her maintenance of her body can please herself (Gill, 2015, p. 281), they consume the woman’s physical appearance for pleasure.

This video is consistent with the way Dallas and Grier emphasize the liberation of women through the use of irony, particularly in Vines which they demonize makeup with cake (e.g. *Girls be like No Makeup Cake*). They put this promise forward in *What Guys Look for in Girls*, and tell the female audience to “be yourself” twice (Crazybetch, 2013, 7:05, 8:10). “Be yourself” recognizes women’s empowerment in the post-welfare era since the neoliberal Margaret Thatcher administration (McCullough, 2010, p. 205) when individuality signals empowerment. The MAGCON boys state that a girl who “is outgoing and excited to do things,” “makes you a better you” and “is freaky when alone”, is welcomed (Crazybetch, 2013, 1:05, 1:10, 6:45). This

coincides with the notion of neoliberal individuality, where individuals are unique thinkers and brands that have distinct values. Dallas and Grier do advocate “girl power”, which they regard as a tool that can boost masculinity via competitiveness between the two genders. Yet this version of girl power also implies that a woman is successful when she can balance her confidence against the threat of the man’s social position, meaning a woman can choose to, but strongly discouraged, to surpass men.

Indeed, “be yourself” is a façade that covers MAGCON’s attempt to sustain women’s passivity to men. This underlying imperative can be read from statements in *What Guys Look for in Girls*, such as “a girl has to be fun,” and “girls cannot be better than guys in video games” (Crazybetch, 2013, 0:17, 3:45, 7:45). These statements legitimize traditional femininity and sustain masculinity in terms of male supremacy. This extends to the viewpoint that women are not born free, that their freedom originates from men which can be taken back anytime. In the video, the boys desire to uphold the systematic suppression in the male-dominated neoliberal culture. It means that a woman can technically gain success by desiring and partly acting like a man, but will be considered deviant, or failed, to mimic one entirely.

In addition, Dallas and Grier redirect “girl power” to the entertainment and erotic pleasure from girls. In *What Guys Look for in Girls*, they single out volleyball as “the hottest girl sport” and cheerleading as girls’ unique “talent” (Crazybetch, 2013, 2:10, 7:55). These activities showcase women’s physiques and fitness in ways consistent with femininity. Moreover, these activities are explicitly sexualized, as suggested by Dallas’s quip “it just got Hot here” after mentioning volleyball (Crazbetch, 2013, 8:05). In this context, women are made to satisfy a male gaze as part of their construction as ideal girls.

Both Dallas and Grier insist that an ideal girl impress men through bodily maintenance, designed to sustain traditional femininity while also appearing authentic. In *What Guys Look for in Girls*, this imperative is articulated in ways that recall Tyra Banks's notion of "fiercely real" (Keller, 2014, p. 152). Dallas and Grier claim to be looking for girls who "have natural hair," "do not draw eyebrows," "have no lip makeup," "are flexible on dress," but "wear long socks," "have good smell," "smile with dimples," "are slim" and most importantly, "shave all the body hair" (Crazybetch, 2013, 4:35-5:57, 7:10). Once again, this coincides with Watts and Orb's (2002) notion that an ideal woman is made for men's "commodification, manipulation and consumption" (quoted in Keller, 2014, p. 155), and that their "naturalness" is indeed suited to men's erotic desires. Grier could not hide this intention when he added aggression to his voice when mentioning the "importance" of shaving (Crazybetch, 2013, 7:10). MAGCON boys promise to help liberate girls from traditional femininity, but they are in fact demanding a post-feminist model girl who is individualized, man-pleasing and willing to commodify herself.

The counterpart to the kind of authenticity demand of the ideal girl can be found in the Vines discussed above that display the boys' sexiness. These Vines serve to construct the maintenance of femininity as corollary. For example, Dallas has displayed his "authenticity" by appearing shirtless, reflecting his "perfect" masculine physical appearance that is designed to appeal to female fans (Huestis, 2014). Simultaneously, some of his body features such as armpit and body hair, six-pack and a strong upper body are symbols of masculinity that reinforce a gender binary in physical appearance. Hence, these Vines set up a mirror image to *What Guys Look for in Girls* as "what girls look for in guys."

The notions of commodity feminism and neoliberal feminism get articulated to the recent phenomenon of the "cool girl" (Petersen, 2014). MAGCON uses the "cool girl" image as a

version of postfeminist empowerment, where men permit women to act like them to a certain extent, and directs the release of “girl power” to performances that don’t fundamentally threaten men’s status. The title *What Guys Look for in Girls* itself is a reflection of neoliberal feminism, in that Dallas and Grier construct the ideal “cool girl” in light of standards determined by men. The boys’ desire to commodify girls by strict demands on looks can result in two effects: first, the codes direct them to gain pleasure through advertising the self, particularly the body as the focal point, under the “self-entrepreneurship” project; second, they foster consumption of products produced and managed by men.

The ideal image of a girl formed by the Vines and YouTube video offers a post-feminist prototypes that is merely a more active version of traditional femininity. Under the “cool girl” rhetoric, a woman is allowed to act more actively and to access male-dominated areas, but only under the supervision of men. Despite the fact that women have a variety of means to express themselves, including acting like men, they still have to impress men. An ideal woman has to obey men’s command under neoliberal feminism, and utilizes the power gained from feminism to strengthen (heterosexual) sex roles. She shall also objectify herself for gazing under commodity feminism, in which not only her critical thinking is undermined, as her appearance becomes the focal point, but she also retains her dependence on men through consumption and unconscious erotic enjoyment. Dallas’s and Grier’s points of views justify objectification, particularly when “attractiveness” is the primary indicator of women’s success in this culture.

Chapter VI: Conclusion, Outlook and Limitations: The Summary of MAGCON's Circuit and the Cessation of the Quest

Conclusion

In sum, MAGCON's Circuit of Culture reinforces hegemonic gender identities under neoliberalism. Under this circuit, producers and performers of MAGCON produce products aligned with mainstream heterosexual norms, which construct and identify modified yet traditional masculinity and femininity as “ideals” throughout the process; Simultaneously, MAGCON’s production team enhances the products’ legitimacy through the regulation of a “family” image; The products are made for consumers (fans) to consume, who choose to “purchase” them for entertainment, fulfillment on sexual desires, and latently, guidelines on “ideal” (but neoliberal in real) gendered identities and roles; Fans signify their subscription to MAGCON’s ideologies via interactions with MAGCON members and obedience to MAGCON’s standards when evaluating their own gendered self (Romano, 2013, para. 10). Ideally for the producers, fans will provide homogenous feedback hence demand, so that producers can replicate their formula for newer productions and manipulation on fans. Ultimately, MAGCON boys display their desire to sustain male dominance, by attracting prospective young females through “ideal” masculinity, and creating suppressive definitions on “ideal” femininity for them to follow.

MAGCON offers one model on the normatively ‘ideal’ gendered identities to the society, and sells it as a service package for subscribers to consume and reproduce the proposed gendered identity for potentially gaining personal values in the society, all under the influence formed and

supervised by adult and social norms,. The formation of connection between the audience and MAGCON is through unconscious sexual pleasure and conscious entertainment value, which are the biggest selling points of MAGCON as a service.

The portrayed masculinity image in MAGCON is indeed a hybrid of “new man” and “new lad” in Gill’s framework (2003). By setting “fun”, “sexiness” and “rebellion” as themes in productions, MAGCON portrays an ideal man as kind, intelligent and fun (characteristics of “new man”), yet strong and unconsciously demanding for women (characteristics of “new lad”). In regard of “new man”, Cameron Dallas and Nash Grier then both demonstrate their “rebellion” in Vines through exaggerated acts and “fun” in Vines through staged deviant acts, that they are brilliant beings who care and treat females well. For “new lad”, MAGCON boys show off their physique and fitness in Vines, and voluntarily commoditize their body in MAGCON tours purposely for fans’ consumption, in order to showcase their desire on (heterosexual) sex and potential power saved to protect women. By adding up the two characteristics, they are labelled by the (mostly female teenage) fans as the “perfect” men on demand.

The “perfect” men in return construct a customized “ideal” femininity for pleasure-seeking (female) fans to follow suit, which this version of femininity well-reflects the neoliberal feminist ideals. Under their notion, females are liberated in everyday behaviours, but are suppressed by men with their partial uphold on traditional feminine customs to the body, such as shaving, being slim, and doing things that showcase these characteristics (e.g. volleyball), for feeding their pleasure from gazing. Girls are told to follow the strict feminine codes, strive for men’s approval and desire a homogenous image of man, in order to make oneself valuable and attractive, which coincide with neoliberal feminist beliefs.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, erotic pleasure is the key that leads a person to perceive the claimed ‘ideal’ images portrayed above as the real ‘ideals’. Both parties, the MAGCON boys and the fans, agree on the relationship being mutually beneficial for distinct reasons. MAGCON triggers fans’ unconscious fantasy towards sexual lives, that they see hope on owning a perfect sex life, which involves high value on gazing and intimacy, in reality. This carries significant meaning for women, as sex with a man can symbolize the possession of power through the possession of penis and the earning of men’s attention under an imbalanced gender relationship. For MAGCON, they are mediated by neoliberal norms to commoditize their talents and sexual appeals. They aim at earning social respect through instant fame, a.k.a. the mass social approval on their branded selves.

The cultivation of ‘reality’ and the effective use of Vine in MAGCON intensifies the conception on the real ‘ideals’. Audience believe in the existence of such ‘perfect’ relationships more when MAGCON transmits the same agenda repetitively and dynamically. MAGCON makes the ideals seemingly universal when they apply the norms to different scenarios in the Vines. The guaranteed opportunity on possessing Dallas’ body in the VIP sessions of MAGCON tours increases resonance of achievable sexual perfection among fans. They channel out their sexual desires through MAGCON to fulfill their emptiness on this subject at their age, and hope for such relationship in real life. However, since real life cannot be staged, it happens to be nearly impossible for them to achieve the same in reality, so that they will rely on MAGCON longer for consistent intimacy. This sustains MAGCON’s popularity and reputation hence its ‘mainstream’ position and the power on cultivation.

MAGCON grabs every opportunity to establish universal one-on-one (heterosexual) relationships in their speeches. Ranging from “where is the booty” (MrDailyVine, 2015, 6:25-

6:32), to song lyrics in *Flights*, the productions portray fantasies on romantic love under neoliberalism, that the individual will perceive its(her) relationship with individuals in MAGCON as more capitalistically valuable, unique and outstanding than others. Dallas and Grier brand themselves authentically in Vines, which they condense everyday actions to six-second segments via careful staging and exclude deviant ideologies in productions to maintain their ‘perfect’ image towards individual Vine members. Since watching Vines is a private business, fans tend to substitute in the relationships individually, which in return sharpen their ideal gendered identities.

Outlook of MAGCON and Vine Culture

The free market competition under neoliberalism signals disposability of objects and ideologies. Similar to the variable, ever-changing lack which leads to one’s different desires mentioned by Lacan (1989; quoted in Storey, 2012, p. 103), the public will demand alternatives when the initial ‘product’ loses its value, either by decreased reputation or the change in demand. Nash Grier’s reputation dropped significantly after posting a homophobic and another racist Vine in 2013-2014 (D S, 2014; LilFlutterFly, 2014), but managed to bounce back.

MAGCON performers reflect the nature of high disposability under neoliberalism. MAGCON’s original 12-person formation only lasted for 7 months (September 2013 to April 2014) before experiencing disbandment in April 2014, due to disputes between members (Superfame, 2015). Two producers, Alan Spiegel and Steven Spiegel, filed for bankruptcy in 2015 (United States Bankruptcy Court: Eastern District of New York, 2015), while MAGCON was reformed in early 2016 with a new, smaller squad that omits the Grier brothers (MAGCON tour, n.d.). While both Dallas and Nash Grier successfully crossed over into the mainstream entertainment industry from this sensational internet phenomenon, Grier gave up on MAGCON

due to its “constraints on [his] personal development” (Superfame, 2016). It implies that other opportunities available have won the competition to Grier, that he disposed Vine as the medium of production. Also, MAGCON has lost its popularity when new competition on other platforms such as (e.g. PewDiePie) and technologies (e.g. YouTube livestreaming, Facebook Live, etc.) commence. MAGCON members themselves disposed Vine the platform, given the members have gained adequate exposure in both MAGCON tours and the mainstream world. While Dallas and Grier become celebrity actors, Shawn Mendes is perhaps the most successful person come out from MAGCON, that he gets to be a global superstar singer. Indeed, Vine itself was shut down in October 2016 due to the loss of popularity hence the revenue to maintain the servers, and has become ‘Vine camera’ – a photo/video editing application since February 2017 (Welch, 2016).

Eventually, Dallas and Grier manually deleted their Vine accounts in 2017, despite past uploads have not been deleted by the service provider. We shall exclaim the disposable nature of new media under participatory culture, that people have so many stories to digest and channels to express oneself, and have less controlled sociality (Van Dijck, 2013, p.159). This implicates the fragile loyalty towards an object and its ideologies to gain self-advantage under neoliberalism.

Limitations and Future Research

The scope of the research is narrow. It solely focuses on the relationship between the producers, consumers and the current social “mainstream” under the Circuit of Culture framework, and neglects specific minorities within the groups and potential effects brought in by outsiders. Therefore, other aspects of MAGCON and its fandom remain to be explored; for instance:

- The relationship between race and gender performances is yet to be investigated. I treat MAGCON fans as a homogenous group that share similar characteristics. However, the connection between the portrayed ideals and race is left unexplained. While I mentioned that all but two MAGCON members are white men, I did not go further explain the origin of the specific gendered performances and the racial background of neoliberalism. Interesting observations unexplained regarding race include that Dallas flirts with Asian girls on the street in a few Vines, while both Dallas and Grier make “fun” of Asians once. What is the connection between whiteness and the normative demands of MAGCON culture?
- Similarly, I could not observe the minor supporters of MAGCON who subscribe to it for alternative reasons (e.g. getting a homosexual intimacy in the perspective of gay men). They are considered deviant subscribers but are protected by Grier’s “do not limit the audience” approach (Bosker, 2014, para. 34). It would be interesting to research how specific audiences are appealed to by MAGCON in ways that represent countercultural norms for romance. How do such non-mainstream audiences negotiate their place among the fan base?

Reflection

I spent an enormous amount of time exploring gender roles and popular culture throughout this fruitful research. The biggest fascination to me is the diversity of variations in gender identities. I could not imagine the high level of commodification in the celebrity culture beforehand, along with the constant pressure towards consumption, even in non-tangible ways. In terms of academic ability, I improved the sense of critical thinking, efficiency in editing and extraction of contents throughout the course, as I have to address points as significant, clear and precise as possible under constraints. Overall, I was a constant learner, not only in most of my academic inquiries (i.e. idol culture & gender norms), but also in practical skills.

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Appendix I: List of Vines Focused in the Research

Cameron Dallas :

1. Mattress Shopping
2. My Quest for The Booty
3. When I See School Stuff
4. When You See An Attractive Person

(All Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhxWyiQ53_E.

Segments of the above 4 Vines: 4:54-5:00 , 6:25-6:31 , 11:37-11:43 , 12:22-12:28)

Nash Grier:

1. Cool Stuff
2. Girls be like No Makeup Cake
3. When You Get into A Hotel

(All Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhQEztUrGNI>

Segments of the above 3 Vines: 1:33-1:40 , 2:09 – 2:15 , 7:56-8:02)

Appendix II: List of Vlogs Regarding MAGCON Tour Focused in the Research (all from 2014)

1. CAMERON DALLAS KISSED ME? Magcon VIP Experience by Hails
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgmAveVU1QQ>
2. MAGCON Chicago 2014 by Tira Sountris
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM9L3FUaows>
3. MAGCON CHICAGO VIP EXPERIENCE - Meeting My Sunshines by Hilarynicolee
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOEostpDOFs> (video turned private)
4. My Magcon VIP Experience / Vlog by Dana Huestis
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbLXTRMhBEE>