

## **"Having it all"?: (Re) examining Conspicuous Consumption and Pernicious Masculinities in South African Chick-Lit**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A number of South African women writers have taken up chick-lit as a form of writing that enables them to reflect on the experiences of the modern woman in post-apartheid South Africa. The protagonists portrayed in chick-lit narratives occupy ambiguous positions: they may have benefitted from feminist politics, which has opened new possibilities for them; however, underlying this emancipation is an implicit collusion with patriarchy. Chick-lit refuses to offer a clear-cut construct of women's lives; instead, it suggests a problematic terrain that is inherently ambiguous and contradictory, simultaneously empowering and oppressing women. It depicts a realistic world where contemporary women critique patriarchy and attempt to break free of its stronghold by finding new methods of self-realisation. In this article, I argue that as a genre chick-lit offers a space of recognition and reflection for women who share a similar world view and emotional knowledge that stems from a common historical experience. Chick-lit also allows women writers to reveal that, for the modern woman, "having it all" comes with the conflicting pressures of negotiating professional careers and consumer culture, thus exposing women's collusion with patriarchy in an increasingly neoliberal world as they attempt to construct new femininities. The article begins by offering an overview of the origins of chick-lit and how it has gone on to become a global phenomenon. This introduction is followed by a discussion of "the trope of the New South African Woman",