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The Ambitious Young Woman and the Contemporary British Sports Film

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Abstract: This article explores how the figure of the ambitious young woman is mediated within contemporary female-centred British sports films. The article begins by briefly outlining the relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism and highlights the relevance of these discourses to contemporary female-centred sports films. It then goes on to explore how postfeminist, neoliberal values are mediated in the construction of the ambitious young woman through an analysis of the British film *Chalet Girl* (2011), using both textual analysis and analysis of the film's extra-cinematic materials. The analysis emphasises the importance of national context within postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, highlighting in particular the significance of the film's depictions of specifically British class hierarchies. The findings of the article demonstrate how, while *Chalet Girl* emphasises class binaries, the film ultimately upholds the neoliberal myth that (class) barriers can be overcome through determination, hard work and the right choices.

Keywords: postfeminism, neoliberalism, British cinema, young women, sport

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The Ambitious Young Woman and the Contemporary British Sports Film

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Introduction

The relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism has been well established by academics. In her work on the postfeminist 'sensibility', Rosalind Gill states that within postfeminist culture, 'every aspect of life is refracted through the idea of personal choice and self-determination'.¹ Meanwhile, Gill and Scharff define neoliberalism as a 'mobile, calculated technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising'.² Unsurprisingly, then, Gill and Scharff conclude that the 'autonomous, self-calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism'.³ Furthermore, Gill and Scharff assert that during the twenty-first century the rise of the postfeminist neoliberal 'can-do' girl 'co-exists alongside the reinvigoration of inequalities', arguably even more so since the global financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent recession.⁴ The 'can-do girl' figure that Gill and Scharff speak of was developed by Australian academic Anita Harris. For Harris, success is constructed as a 'mainstream experience' for young women, where 'good choices, effort and ambition alone' are all it takes to succeed, regardless of the growing inequalities.⁵ The 'can-do' girls are at the heart of this neoliberal construction of success. They are the 'girls with the world at their feet':

¹ Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility', in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10.2 (2007), 147-166 (p.156).

² Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, 'Introduction', in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. by Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-19 (p. 5).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵ Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 16.

[They] are identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle.⁶

Harris' work is aligned with Angela McRobbie, who writes from a UK perspective. McRobbie argues that today's young women are 'attributed with capacity'. This allows young women to come forward into 'visibility', but only on the understanding that the goals of feminism have been achieved.⁷ Moreover, McRobbie notes that one particular area in which female capacity is emphasised is within the field of career and education. These 'top girls', she says, are 'understood to be ideal subjects of female success, exemplars of the new competitive meritocracy'.⁸ This idea of 'meritocracy' – the idea that anyone can succeed if they just work hard enough – is often associated in the UK with the rhetoric of the New Labour government (1997-2010), particularly within education.⁹

This article will explore how the figure of the ambitious young woman is mediated within contemporary British cinema, particularly within the female-centred sports film. Drawing on Harris' concept of the 'can-do' girl and McRobbie's work on 'top girls', this article will employ textual analysis and analysis of extra-cinematic materials in order to examine contemporary British cinema's construction of the ambitious young woman. This dual approach will enable me to explore how the figure of the ambitious young woman is mediated and how this discourse circulates both *inside* and *around* the film within a wider media, in order to gain a greater understanding of the significance of this figure and the wider cultural context in which contemporary British cinema operates. In doing so, this article will emphasise the importance of national context and how depictions of British class

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷ Angela McRobbie, 'Top Girls?', in *Cultural Studies*, 21:4-5 (2007), 718-737 (p.718).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 727.

hierarchies play an important part in the contemporary British sports film's representation of the ambitious young woman.

It has been noted that postfeminist discourses have become increasingly prominent within representations of women's sports – particularly young women – in recent years. In her examination of the image of the female athlete's body within a neoliberal context, Leslie Heywood raises some interesting points about how discourses of girlhood can be successfully incorporated into representations of women's sport. Heywood draws on the aforementioned work by Anita Harris and Angela McRobbie in order to examine how US government sports programs draw on the neoliberal construction of girlhood to promote the idea of the healthy and successful young woman. For Heywood, these programmes present sport as a place where 'young girls learn to take responsibility for their own lives – a responsibility that has care of the body for health and "success" at its core'.¹⁰ Heywood claims 'the ideal image of female athletes perfectly incorporates the ideal of the new, can-do, DIY, take responsibility-for-yourself subject'.¹¹ The female athlete is the 'perfect representative agency for this idea of success, the "can do" mapped directly onto her biceps'.¹²

This link between representations of women's sports and the 'can-do' girl is evident within the proliferation of female sports films that have emerged since the millennium. The sports portrayed are varied, including football in films such as *She's the Man*,¹³ street dance - as seen in the *Step Up* franchise¹⁴ - and cheerleading in the *Bring It On*¹⁵ films to name but

¹⁰ Leslie Heywood, 'Producing girls: Empire, sport and the neoliberal body', in *Physical culture, power and the body*, ed. by Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 101-120 (p. 104).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹³ *She's the Man*, dir. by Andy Fickman (Entertainment in Video, 2006) [DVD].

¹⁴ *Step Up*, dir. by Anne Fletcher (Universal, 2006) [DVD].

¹⁵ *Bring it On*, dir. by Peyton Reed (Entertainment in Video, 2000) [DVD].

a few. Despite this variety, these films all exemplify 'can-do' femininity through narratives that present healthy, hard-working and tenacious young women. Katharina Lindner has examined female-led Hollywood sports films, such as *Million Dollar Baby* and the aforementioned *She's the Man*, to 'map the ways in which the intertwining of neo-liberal and postfeminist discourses is variously inscribed on and embodied by the figure of the female athlete'.¹⁶ Lindner's work here is focused primarily on the athlete's body, and how it is inscribed within the film text itself. This article will go beyond this to examine how the sportswoman is constructed as a figure through which the ambitious girl discourse can be mediated within the film text and also within the wider media through an analysis of the film's extra-cinematic materials, such as reviews and promotional interviews. Moreover, Lindner also points to the fact that 'there has been a notable increase in female sports films over the last 20 years'.¹⁷ She attributes this increase in part to the 'increased visibility of female athletes in the media landscape and with the emergence of postfeminist discourses'.¹⁸ For Lindner, this increase in female-centred sports films in recent years is unsurprising given how their narratives of young women overcoming obstacles and achieving success through their own hard work and '(bodily) self-discipline' neatly incorporate discourses of postfeminist individualism.¹⁹ Lindner is specifically discussing Hollywood films, but British cinema has also witnessed an increase in female-centred sports films in recent years, with films such as *Bend It Like Beckham*,²⁰ *Freestyle*,²¹ *StreetDance*

¹⁶ Katharina Lindner, 'Blood, Sweat and Tears: Women, Sport and Hollywood', in *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 238-255 (p. 238).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁰ *Bend It Like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (Lions Gate Home Entertainment, 2002) [DVD].

²¹ *Freestyle*, dir. by Kolton Lee (Revolver Entertainment, 2009) [DVD].

3D,²² *Chalet Girl*²³ and *Fast Girls*.²⁴ As Tasker and Negra observe, this is indicative of the idea that 'Postfeminism is a pervasive phenomenon of both British and American popular culture, often marked by a degree of discursive harmony'.²⁵ However, Tasker and Negra also acknowledge that national context plays an important part in the construction of postfeminism,²⁶ and it is this idea of national context that underpins this article's examination of British cinema's representation of the figure of the ambitious girl within the contemporary British sports film.

In her article, 'Postfeminism in the British Frame', Justine Ashby explores the mutual relationship between postfeminism and the New Labour government through the use of 'girl power' as promoted by the pop group the Spice Girls in the nineties, using *Bend It Like Beckham* as a case study. Ashby argues that through the depoliticised rhetoric of 'girl power', the film assuages a number of social issues.²⁷ Issues of class and race are glossed over to the point that they do not exist. *Bend It Like Beckham* was released during the height of New Labour in 2002. While the films mentioned above also contain an 'upbeat postfeminist message' like the one Ashby identifies in *Bend It Like Beckham*,²⁸ it is notable that the more recent female British sports films released since the financial crisis of 2008 and the emergence of a Conservative coalition in the UK in 2010 have an overwhelming preoccupation with class, even if the problem of class is eventually overcome. This issue of class is usually presented in terms of binaries of (upper) middle class versus working class, a binary that is particularly prominent in my main case study, *Chalet Girl*. *Chalet Girl* tells the

²² *StreetDance 3D*, dir. by Max Giwa and Dania Pasquini (Entertainment One, 2011) [DVD].

²³ *Chalet Girl*, dir. by Phil Traill (Momentum Pictures, 2011) [DVD].

²⁴ *Fast Girls*, dir. by Noel Clarke (Studiocanal, 2012) [DVD].

²⁵ Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, 'Introduction', *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, (London: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 1-26 (p.13).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁷ Justine Ashby, 'Postfeminism in the British Frame', in *Cinema Journal*, 44.2 (2005), 127-132 (p. 130).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

story of nineteen-year-old Kim Matthews (Felicity Jones), a former skateboarding champion who gave up competing following the death of her mother in a car crash on the way to a competition. She now works in a fast food restaurant and lives with her hapless father, William (Bill Bailey), who was recently made redundant. In order to bring home more money, Kim takes a job as a chalet girl at an Austrian ski resort, where she rediscovers her competitive spirit through snowboarding and falls in love with the chalet owner's wealthy son, Jonny (Ed Westwick). My in-depth analysis of the film text and its extra-cinematic materials will enable me to examine how recent British female sports films mediate neoliberal, postfeminist values through their representation of the figure ambitious young woman. This includes the use of 'glossy' aesthetics (which are at odds with what is thought of as 'typically' British cinema); the use of branding and marketing; and the construction of the actresses themselves as 'can-do' girls who work hard to ensure success.

'Top girls', posh girls and *Chalet Girl(s)*

Chalet Girl marks Kim out as a 'can-do' girl from an early age. The opening scene of the film shows T4 presenters Miquita Oliver and Rick Edwards²⁹ discussing Kim's former career, where it is revealed she won a major skateboarding competition at just eleven years old. Having achieved success at a young age, Kim was expected to have a bright future as someone who works hard and achieves her (sporting) goals. The tone of the presenters' report then changes as they note sadly how Kim has not been seen in skateboarding competitions since the car crash that killed her mother. The scene ends with Oliver

²⁹ T4 was a weekend scheduling slot on Channel 4 that was aimed at the 16-34 demographic. T4 ran from 1998-2012. Emily Sheridan, 'End of an era! Channel 4 axe "hangover TV" T4 after 14 years', *Daily Mail*, 12 October 2012 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2216936/Channel-4-axe-hangover-TV-T4-14-years.html> [accessed 5 November 2014].

addressing Kim directly with the line: 'Wherever you are, we hope you're living the dream'. The scene then cuts to a bored looking Kim at work in a fast food restaurant. The contrast is stark as it is immediately obvious that Kim is far from 'living the dream' as expected. The irony of the image created by the abrupt cut between the two worlds has a comical edge to it but the message is clear: girls as ambitious and talented as Kim should not be doing this kind of work. It is represented as unfulfilling and demeaning and Kim laments how her 'summer job became the rest of [her] life job'. These low-paying service sector jobs are viewed as temporary 'stop gaps' for young women as they work towards gaining qualifications and planning their careers and are not intended to be permanent. The film's attitude towards Kim's job corresponds with Angela McRobbie's observations that today's young woman is incorporated into governmental discourses 'as much for their productive as reproductive capacities'. This means she is 'encouraged to avoid low-paid and gendered jobs', such as Kim's.³⁰

This 'top girl' discourse travels beyond Kim's early skateboarding success within the film as it also informs critics' discussions of actress Felicity Jones. The 'top girl' is strongly linked to New Labour's stance on education, as she is defined in particular by her success at school and university. For McRobbie, the 'top girl' is understood as the 'bearer of qualifications', an 'active and aspirational subject of the education system' and she 'embodies the meritocratic values which New Labour has sought to implement in schools'.³¹ Young women's educational success contributes to their status as 'subjects of capacity', and as such even young women from working class backgrounds are expected to obtain degree level qualifications more now than ever before.³² Jones' own 'top girl' status is articulated

³⁰ McRobbie, p. 722.

³¹ Ibid., p. 722.

³² Ibid, p. 722.

throughout her publicity interviews, with one interviewer notably describing her as possessing a 'top-set-in-all-subjects charm'.³³ Others draw attention to the fact that Jones managed to successfully combine studying for a degree at Oxford University while continuing her role as Emma Grundy in Radio 4's *The Archers*, a role she acquired aged fifteen.³⁴ This reinforces the idea of Jones as a 'top girl' because she is shown to be a 'bearer of qualifications', with a degree from a renowned university no less, and a 'subject of capacity' who participates in the labour market through employment.³⁵ Jones also exhibits some of the characteristics Harris attributes to 'can-do' girls, as it is clear she has been committed to constructing her career from a young age.³⁶ In addition, the film's reviews praise Jones' successful performance, attributing her with the ability to single-handedly 'save' the film.³⁷ She is marked as an actress 'heading for the top'³⁸ and a 'rising star'.³⁹

Discussions of Jones' path to success via her education and employment present her as distinctly middle class and privileged. Within the film, however, Kim's future success is initially much more uncertain, and it is suggested that her working class background could prevent her from achieving her goals. The film acknowledges the impact of the UK's economic recession through the character of Kim's father, William, who is unemployed and unable to find a new job. The camera captures the 'final demand' notices as they fall through the letterbox and it is clear Kim and William are struggling to survive on Kim's small salary. In addition, not only is Kim the main financial provider for the household, but she

³³ Cath Clarke, 'Felicity Jones: British film's new it-girl?', *Time Out*, 17 February 2011 <http://www.timeout.com/london/film/felicity-jones-british-films-new-it-girl-1> [accessed 30 October 2014].

³⁴ Carole Cadwalladr, 'Felicity Jones: "There's a sensation when you're performing of release"', *The Observer*, 20 February 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/feb/20/felicity-jones-chalet-girl-interview> [accessed 30 October 2014].

³⁵ McRobbie, p. 722.

³⁶ Harris, p. 14.

³⁷ Alex Zane, 'Chalet Girl', *The Sun*, 18 March 2011, p. 2.

³⁸ Steve Pratt, 'Chalet Girl', *The Northern Echo*, 17 March 2011, p. 29.

³⁹ Tim Robey, 'McConaughy back on the case', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 2011, p. 27.

also runs the household and completes all the domestic tasks. However, comedian Bill Bailey's humorous performance – which includes licking a frozen meal like an ice lolly because he is so lacking in domestic skills that he cannot even use a microwave – and the construction of his character as comically hapless serves to 'gloss over' the economic difficulties the characters are experiencing. This is also in keeping with the fact that the promotional quotes selected for the film and its trailer position the film primarily as a romantic comedy, rather than a sports film.⁴⁰

Kim's working class background is further emphasised during the scene in which she undergoes an interview for the post of chalet girl. The camera pans down the line as each candidate introduces herself. Each girl is dressed in a manner that conveys their stereotypical upper class femininity, with names like 'Henrietta', 'Isabella' and 'Petronella', eventually reaching Kim at the end of the line, who is casually dressed, wearing a t-shirt and trousers and no visible make-up. The contrast between Kim's appearance, and even the sound of her name, in comparison to the other girls provides a visual and aural joke, while highlighting the idea that Kim does not belong in this particular upper-middle class world. Jones' performance also reinforces this as she pauses slightly before speaking, giving the impression that she is considering giving herself a more 'appropriate' name because she is very aware that she does not fit in. This scene also foreshadows the class divide that Kim will experience in her work as a chalet girl that will also provide much of the film's conflict, particularly between Kim and her posh co-worker Georgie (Tamsin Egerton).

As she begins work as a chalet girl, Kim's new world is one of affluence, with awe-inspiring mountains and imposing chalets. The images of wealth on display are far removed from Kim's everyday reality. As one chalet guest remarks, it is as if 'the global recession is

⁴⁰ IMDb.com, *Chalet Girl* (UK, 2011) http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1487118/?ref=fn_al_tt_1 [accessed 1 November 2014].

just something that happened to other people'. The film's bright and glossy aesthetics heighten this sense of wealth, despite the fact the film's budget was a relatively small £8 million.⁴¹ The use of aspirational aesthetics is central to the contemporary female sports film and is often achieved by hiring directors who usually work in more commercial and glamorous areas of the media. For example, *Fast Girls* was directed by Regan Hall, who had previously worked as a director for fashion commercials,⁴² while *StreetDance 3D* was directed by Max Giwa and Dania Pasquini, who had previously directed music promos for artists such as Girls Aloud.⁴³ The use of aspirational aesthetics in these films is much remarked upon in their promotion and reception, largely because they are seen as the antithesis of the 'gritty' style synonymous with British realist cinema. This is particularly evident within the critical reception of *StreetDance 3D*, in which the film's representation of London as a glamorous city with a New York-esque skyline led critics to enthuse that 'London has never looked so good'⁴⁴ and it was a 'thrill' to see London presented as a 'place of aspiration'... as opposed to knife crime'.⁴⁵

The wealth exhibited by Jonny and his family is attributed to economic neoliberalism, as Jonny's father (Bill Nighy) is a successful businessman, as are most of the male guests. As such the film privileges wealth acquired through hard work rather than

⁴¹ Michael Leader, 'Chalet Girl review', *Den of Geek*, 16 March 2011

<http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/7207/chalet-girl-review> [accessed 31 October 2014].

A number of measures were taken to create the film's glossy, 'aspirational' feel on a tight budget, such as actress Brooke Shields wearing her own engagement ring to reflect her character's wealth (Ibid.).

⁴² Regan Hall, *Fast Girls Production Notes* (London: Optimum Releasing, 2012)

press.optimumreleasing.net/.../FAST%20GIRLS%20Production%20Notes.doc [accessed 20 December 2013].

⁴³ James Richardson, *StreetDance 3D Production Notes* (London: Vertigo Films, 2010)

http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CIIBEBYwCQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fimg.fdb.cz%2Fmaterialy%2F3452-STREETDANCE-PROD-NOTES.doc&ei=F-DOUrWOJYLxhQegkYDACw&usg=AFQjCNEhQ-3YJz252zzVwK_NgW2CDFR_zw&bvm=bv.59026428,d.bGQ

[accessed 10 December 2013].

⁴⁴ Maria Duarte, 'A hit in 3D for teen dancers', *Morning Star*, 21 May 2010.

⁴⁵ Henry Fitzherbert, 'StreetDance 3D', *Sunday Express*, 23 May 2010

<http://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/176691/Film-review-round-up-Streetdance-3D-Prince-of-Persia-The-Sands-Of-Time-Bad-Lieutenant> [accessed 20 December 2013].

inheritance. Kim also works hard to earn money as a chalet girl and she dutifully sends her earnings home to her father. This leaves little opportunity for Kim to take part in the consumer culture that is so integral to postfeminist culture. As Diane Negra states, 'Postfeminism attaches considerable importance to the formulation of an expressive personal identity and the ability to select the right commodities to attain it'.⁴⁶ Therefore, in order to achieve ideal postfeminist femininity, one must be able to afford the necessary products. Within *Chalet Girl*, this idea of ideal femininity is inextricably linked to class, as the contrast between Kim and fellow chalet girl Georgie demonstrates. Working-class Kim is initially presented as a typical 'tomboy'. She does not wear dresses or make-up, she has previously pursued 'active sports' as a former skateboarder and even her name is traditionally masculine.⁴⁷ Jamie Skerski notes how in 'nearly all forms of hegemonic narratives' the tomboy is made to relinquish the boyish activities she enjoyed as a child and realise it is 'natural to eventually embrace her true womanhood'.⁴⁸ No longer a child, Kim is in some ways caught between being a 'tomboy' and embracing her true womanhood⁴⁹ as she is also the domestic caretaker in the family since the death of her mother, which suggests she cannot escape fulfilling the traditionally feminine role. By contrast, Georgie's image is one of stereotypical middle-class femininity, with expensive blonde highlights and branded clothes. Actress Tamsin Egerton describes Georgie's style as a 'mixture of granny clothes and Jack Wills'.⁵⁰ The Jack Wills brand is distinctly British and aimed at affluent, young middle-class people. According to the Jack Wills website, the brand designs 'British

⁴⁶ Diane Negra, *What a girl wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Jamie Skerski, 'Tomboy Chic: Refashioning Gender Rebellion', in *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 15:4 (2011), 466-479 (p. 468).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁵⁰ Tamsin Egerton, 'Tamsin Egerton Interview', *View London* <http://www.viewlondon.co.uk/cinemas/tamsin-egerton-interview-feature-interview-3939.html> [accessed 11 December 2013].

heritage-inspired goods for the university crowd' in order to create a 'distinctive connection between the old and new, epitomising what it is to be young and Fabulously British', an ethos that is very much apparent in Egerton's portrayal of Georgie's British upper-middle-class femininity.⁵¹ The disparity between Kim and Georgie's respective appearances implies that Kim's status as a tomboy is very much linked to her working class status. Although she may enjoy adopting this image, the film's engagement with postfeminist principles support the notion that – as mentioned above - the ideal feminine appearance has to be bought through the purchasing of the right clothes and cosmetics, something Kim cannot afford to do. Kim must therefore enlist Georgie's help to look more appropriate when working for the upper-middle-class chalet owners. Kim is forced to change her clothes and become more 'feminine'. Trainers are swapped for high heels and she gets rid of her leggings so that her long top is transformed into a short dress. Georgie also teaches Kim how to apply make-up. Kim's makeover enables her to become more feminised and integrate herself with her 'posh' fellow chalet girls and guests.

Makeover is central to postfeminist culture, and is a key feature of texts centred on and/or aimed at teenage girls in particular. In her work on the television makeover programme, Brenda R. Weber discusses the significance of the makeover in the new millennium. Weber observes how, in the twenty-first century, appearance 'functions as an indicator of professional competence' because in the 'increasingly globalized economy where the neoliberal subject can circulate the globe, such appearance-based citizenship is crucial for business success'.⁵² Indeed Kim's makeover is facilitated by the need to appear more professionally competent in her work as a chalet girl at the Austrian resort. In

⁵¹ Jack Wills, 'About Jack Wills' <http://www.jackwills.com/en-gb/about-jack-wills> [accessed 2 November 2014].

⁵² Brenda R. Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship and Celebrity* (London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 25.

addition, Weber notes how female bodies ‘must look and behave according to the terms of conventional femininity’ and the makeover ‘doesn’t create but brings out one’s inner woman’.⁵³ The makeover that Kim undergoes not only makes visible her conventional femininity, but also the fact that the makeover seemed to require very little effort – merely modifying the clothes Kim already owned and applying a bit of make-up – suggests that this femininity was ‘inside’ Kim all along and it just needed to be located. This is similar to Diane Negra’s claim that ‘In postfeminist consumer culture, the makeover is a key ritual of female coming into being’⁵⁴ and it allows for a ‘revelation of the self that has been there all along’.⁵⁵ This idea that that her makeover revealed ‘the self that has been there all along’⁵⁶ is evident when Jonny sees Kim post-makeover and remarks, ‘And with that she became a swan’. Although seemingly said in jest, Jonny’s comment alludes to the story of the ‘ugly duckling’ - whose ‘true self’ was a beautiful swan – and suggests that Kim’s acceptance into this new affluent world is like a fairytale that is easy to achieve as long as Kim is able to demonstrate that she is suitably feminine.

Not only does Kim need to become more typically feminine in order to be successful as a chalet girl, she also realises that she needs to become an adept consumer if she is going to succeed in the snowboarding competition. She subsequently decides not to send her next pay packet home but instead use it to buy the ‘right’ equipment. Branding and consumption are integral to the film text, not least through the casting of Ed Westwick as Jonny, who is known for his role as Chuck Bass in the American teen series *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), a programme that focused on a group of highly affluent teenagers and was noted for its focus

⁵³ Weber, p. 128.

⁵⁴ Negra, p. 123.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

on 'education about, and consumption of, contemporary fashions'.⁵⁷ They are also central to the film's marketing and promotional discourses. The film was promoted using an 'innovative online campaign that integrates Facebook "like" buttons into an interactive trailer to drive social media engagement'.⁵⁸ Clicking on the 'like' button provides users with access to cast information and details of the locations used in the film. It also includes brands featured in the film, such as Roxy, Thomas Cook and Intersport. According to Jamie Schwarz, Vice President of Theatrical Marketing at Momentum Pictures, *Chalet Girl* was the first film to integrate the 'like' button functionality.⁵⁹ The campaign uses the idea that audiences often are inspired by the lifestyles portrayed in films and takes this even further to encourage viewers to 'get involved' and to 'identify themselves with the cool brands it features'.⁶⁰ One particular brand that appears prominently within the film is Roxy as Kim enters the Roxy Slopestyle snowboarding competition and the cast wear Roxy ski suits.

The use of the Roxy brand within the film and its marketing is particularly interesting. Writing about Roxy's advertising campaigns, Leslie Heywood explains how the brand embodies the idea of the neoliberal 'can-do' girl. She notes how the sports associated with Roxy, such as snowboarding, require 'a body that can adapt to any situation', just as the global economy requires young women in particular to adapt to changing parameters.⁶¹ For Heywood, the athletic female body 'is representative of the success a young sporting girl will have in her life, and part of that success is as a member of the consumer culture who

⁵⁷ Helen Warner, 'Style over substance? Fashion, spectacle and narrative in contemporary US television', *Popular Narrative Media*, 2.2 (2009), 181-193 (p. 181).

⁵⁸ Jamie Schwarz, 'Rom-com *Chalet Girl* movie gets social push', *Brand Republic*, 18 February 2011 <http://www.brandrepublic.com/News/1055707/Rom-com-Chalet-Girl-movie-gets-social-push/> [accessed 1 November 2014].

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Leslie Heywood, 'Producing girls: Empire, sport and the neoliberal body', in *Physical culture, power and the body*, ed. by Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 101-120, (p. 113).

consumes' Roxy.⁶² It is impossible to ignore here the links between Heywood's description of the 'Roxy girl' and Anita Harris' 'can-do' girl, who is noted for her 'display of a consumer lifestyle'.⁶³ It would seem, therefore, that participation within a consumer culture is both necessary for young women's success and also a reflection of that success. This is also evident within the film as Kim's success is in many ways dependent on her ability to buy into the consumer culture by purchasing the right clothes and snowboarding equipment that will improve her chances in the competition. She can then maintain this investment in consumer culture with her prize money. Similarly, the film's interactive marketing campaign encourages the 'can-do' girl within the audience to aspire to participate within this consumer culture to ensure her own success.

Although Kim has taken steps to securing her success through consumption, it seems as if Kim's hard work could be in vain as flashbacks of the car crash that killed her mother prevent her from attempting the highest snowboarding jumps. Within contemporary texts centred around postfeminist teenage girls, the mother figure is frequently notably absent, either because they are dead - as is the case in *Chalet Girl* – missing, or, if they are present, they are represented as being so 'selfish and narcissistic'⁶⁴ they are often a hindrance to their daughters. This trope of the absent mother can be found in a number of contemporary British female sports films in particular. In *Fast Girls*, it is clear from the beginning that Shania's (Lenora Crichlow) mother is dead. In *Bend It Like Beckham*, meanwhile, although Jess (Parminder Nagra) and Jules' (Keira Knightley) mothers are very much part of their upbringing, the film suggests that their mothers' selfish and 'laughably *prefeminist*' views are the biggest threat to their footballing ambitions, while their fathers are shown to be

⁶² Ibid., p. 114.

⁶³ Harris, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Melanie Kennedy, 'Bratz, BFFs, Princesses and Popstars: Femininity and Celebrity in Tween Popular Culture', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2012), p. 140.

generally more supportive.⁶⁵ In her work on US tween culture, Melanie Kennedy notes how the absence of the mother 'epitomises tween culture's reliance on the fairytale's family structure'⁶⁶ in which the absence of the mother allows 'the daughter to *need* her father in the development of her gendered self'.⁶⁷ Kennedy attributes this to the wider 'backlash' against second-wave feminism within popular culture,⁶⁸ highlighting how this narrative structure enables the films to 'demonstrate that ultimately the *father* provides the best guidance on the teenage girls' 'becoming' a woman.⁶⁹ However, although *Chalet Girl* adheres to this trope of the dead biological mother, in the end it is not her father that guides Kim to the success that enables her to discover her 'true' self. This is evident when Kim recalls her mother's words: 'With brains in your head, feet in your shoes, you can steer yourself any way you choose'. She also imagines her mum in the crowd waving a 'Go Kim' banner, which enables her to complete the highest jump and win the competition. Kim's mother's words convey the sentiment of the neoliberal 'can-do' girl as they suggest that all a girl needs to succeed is determination because she is autonomous and responsible for her own life through the choices she makes. However, although, as this line shows, neoliberal culture upholds the myth that being a 'can-do' girl is straightforward – a matter of choice and determination – as Kim's journey within the film has demonstrated, a girl must be highly strategic in order to make the right choices, including exhibiting the correct consumer behaviour.

Kim's status as a 'can-do' girl is cemented when she wins the competition – along with its \$25,000 prize money – and enters into a romantic relationship with Jonny. Within

⁶⁵ Ashby, p. 130.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

contemporary films centred around and aimed at teenage girls, the acquisition of a heterosexual romance is the 'prize' for successfully performing femininity⁷⁰ and *Chalet Girl* is no exception, as it seems Jonny is Kim's true reward for being a successful 'can-do' girl. Kim also wins the approval of Jonny's parents and gains acceptance and entry into their affluent upper-middle-class world. Perhaps most significantly about the film's ending, however, is the idea that, through her determination, good choices and consumption, Kim has (re)discovered her 'true self'. Diane Negra observes how 'the postfeminist subject is represented as having lost herself but then (re)achieving stability'⁷¹ and in the final scene of *Chalet Girl*, Kim is interviewed by Miquita Oliver in the T4 studio, who congratulates her for winning the competition and for having a 'hot boyfriend', thus for achieving ideal femininity. This scene completes the circular nature of the film because at the beginning of the film Oliver and Edwards lamented Kim's absence from the competition. Now Kim has been 'found' as she is present in the studio, complete with wealth and a boyfriend. Therefore, in entering this new middle-class world, the emphasis is not on the idea that she has abandoned her previous life, but that she has simply, and inevitably, rediscovered her status as a successful girl.

In conclusion, this article has explored how the figure of the ambitious young woman is mediated within the contemporary British sports film, using the film *Chalet Girl* as a case study. These female-centred sports films highlight the links between the self-reinventing, independent postfeminist woman and the autonomous neoliberal subject. The typical sports film narrative is ideally placed to tell stories of young women who meticulously plan, train, make sacrifices and overcome obstacles to achieve their goals, in keeping with the

⁷⁰ Sarah Gilligan, 'Performing Postfeminist Identities: Gender, Costume and Transformations in Teen Cinema', in *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture*, ed. by Melanie Waters, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 167-181 (p. 167).

⁷¹ Negra, p. 5.

ideals of postfeminism and neoliberalism. Their glossy aesthetics, meanwhile, celebrate and encourage aspiration and participation in consumer culture. These neoliberal discourses also often travel beyond the film text, continuing to circulate within promotional and reception materials. This article has also highlighted the importance of national context in its discussion of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses through its analysis of *Chalet Girl*. *Chalet Girl* emphasises the significance of the British class system to the film's representation of the ambitious young woman in its depiction of typically British class hierarchies. The film acknowledges the impact of the global recession on its working-class protagonist and in comparison to Kim the upper-middle-class chalet girls, such as Georgie, are initially presented as comical stereotypes who lack intelligence. However, the film upholds the values of aspiration and meritocracy, as class barriers are overcome and Kim gains entry into this affluent world through participation and success in sport. Kim proves herself to be the ideal successful 'can-do' girl and in doing so, rediscovers her 'true' self. The road to success is not shown to be so easy for Kim, but *Chalet Girl* reinforces the neoliberal myth that determination, hard work and good (consumer) choices will be rewarded with a dream lifestyle.

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