

Fallacy of the Nut Pussy: Cross Dressing, Black Comedy, and Women

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At the 2009 Black Entertainment Television music awards show, a parody of a movie trailer was shown. It begins with the backside image of a hefty Black woman, walking in a floral-print dress while wearing a gray-haired wig. Words appear on the screen: “You’ve seen the grandmother go to the picnic. You’ve seen the grandmother go to jail, but what do you know about the original mad Black woman?” As the background music starts, an image of two Black women figures appears on the screen. Both women rob a bank with guns in hand. These characters are wearing blond wigs and long colorful fingernails, and each has protruding, colorful lips and an overly large, padded buttocks. In the midst of the bank robbery, a White male security guard heroically runs into the bank, yelling, “Freeze, Skanks!” Within this two-minute movie trailer, the audience learns that this film is titled *Skank Robbers*, brought to them by the makers of *Godzilla* and the producers of *Planet of the Apes*. At the end of the clip, a deep, masculine voice tells the audience, “She’s the brain, she’s the brawn, and they’re both the ugly” (Stephenson).

This phony movie trailer was so well received it was considered as a possible film by Screen Gems Film Company (“What Ever Happened”). This parody offered images of three of the most popular cross-dressed performances of Black male comedians from the 1990s until today: Martin Lawrence’s role as Sheneneh Jenkins in the Fox television series *Martin*, Jamie Foxx’s character, Wanda, from the Fox comedy series *In Living Color*, and most recently, Tyler Perry’s portrayal and franchise of Madea in numerous films and television and theater productions.

Within the African American community, cross-dressing, more specifically, Black men portraying Black women, has often been met with great controversy. Todd Boyd argues that, “[p]erhaps by feminizing the image of Black masculinity, KATRINA THOMPSON MOORE is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and African American Studies at Saint Louis University. Her research focuses on the construction and display of race and gender in popular culture from the nineteenth century until present day. She is the author of *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery*. Her reviews and essays have appeared in *Black Women, Gender, and Families Journal*, *Journal of the Civil War Era*, *American Book Review*, and *Journal of African American History*. She can be reached at katrina.moore@slu.edu.

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some people are made to feel less threatened and more comfortable... I don't want to see any more Black men in dresses.... There are already too many forces at work in society attempting to emasculate Black men as it is" (Boyd). Boyd's comment speaks directly from a long history of the term "emasculatation" being associated with Black male identity due to Black men being denied full participation in White male patriarchal privilege. However, this preoccupation with Black masculinity and cross-dressing often neglects how these performances relate to Black femininity and womanhood. Several scholars have viewed these cross-dressing Black men as representative of Black female stereotypes. Hilary Christian refers to these characters as "misogynoir at its best (or worst) with Black women as the punchline."¹ These roles exhibit the strong characteristics of negative labels that have been placed on Black women for over a century. Nevertheless, a major aspect of these characters has been neglected—that they are portrayed by Black men. For this reason, I distinguish this character type as distinct from other Black female stereotypes and place it into its own category, the Black Macho Woman (BMW).² Accurately naming this stereotype within Black comedy distinguishes it from other male cross-dressing roles and Black female caricatures.

The reincarnation of Wanda and Sheneneh and the references to Madea in *Skank Robbers* was not coincidental. These roles were a part of the impetus that launched some of the most famous Black actors' Hollywood careers including Martin Lawrence, Jamie Foxx, and Tyler Perry. For these reasons, this article will focus on Lawrence's Sheneneh, Foxx's Wanda, and Perry's Madea to explore and clearly define the BMW stereotype. Beyond these roles, Eddie Murphy's Rasputia from the film *Norbit* (2007) will be discussed because of Murphy's association with cross-dressing characters throughout his film career. Furthermore, I examine Flip Wilson's character, Geraldine Jones, who Donald Bogle labels as the

¹ The term misogynoir was coined by activist Moya Bailey and is defined as "intersection of racism, anti-Blackness, and misogyny that Black women experience." The Resistance. "On Moya Bailey, Misogynoir, and Why Both Are Important." *The Visibility Project*, 27 May 2014, www.thevisibilityproject.com/2014/05/27/on-moya-bailey-misogynoir-and-why-both-are-important.

² The cross-dressed characters that are the focus on this article will be referred to as BMW or the feminine designations of "her" or "she." The singular they/them/theirs is often used as gender-neutral pronouns. However, these characters do not fall within this category. Since they are portraying a female character, I am using the feminine pronouns to represent their role.

“precursor” to Sheneneh and who laid the foundation for the BMW stereotype (*Primetime Blues* 182). Through female masquerade, these Black male comedians are repositioning Black women into creatures of sexualization, victimization, ridicule, and aggression. I trace the many ways Black male comedians use disguises not only as entertainment but as cultural performances that express their anxieties, fears, and desires toward Black women. Central to my thesis is that the caricaturization of Black womanhood within these BMW performances does not represent a desire to promote female power. Rather, they seek to reclaim male power.

Black Macho Woman

The BMW comes from the incongruity I observed between scholarship on cross-dressing and the actual characters developed in Black comedy. The BMW is not an all-encompassing term. Not every cross-dressed performance carried out by a Black man falls within this category. I construct the term Black Macho Woman based on the work of theorists Michelle Wallace and Robert Stoller. Wallace in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* defines the Black Macho as having “unpredictability, virility and a big mouth,” essentially an overtly masculine Black man who often expresses his lack of power through hate and violence toward women, especially Black women (48). The BMW does not hate Black women but reflects a gender tension within the Black community. BMWs wear female clothing but they are assertively and intentionally masculine, sometimes hyper-masculine (Boorstein 163-7). Second, Stoller in *Sex and Gender* asserts that the phallic woman is essentially a woman who expresses “masculinity by imitation and identification, and maleness (a penis) by hallucination,” and who castrate men.³ He continues by asserting that through the disguise of a woman, men restore their “dignity by finally getting...revenge on women...thus salvag[ing] some sexual potency, power, and masculinity” (Stoller 214). Both Stoller’s and Wallace’s theories epitomizes the BMW in the manner these cross-

³ The Phallic Woman reviewed by Robert Stoller is adapted by Freudian theory. There are several key flaws in his overall analysis, and many scholars have responded or furthered his work, such as Judith Butler in her 1993 book *Bodies That Matter*, later in her 1999 work *Gender Trouble*, and Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s 1998 work *Female Masculinity*.

dressing performances are used to denigrate black women while empowering black men.

From Wench to Skank

The performance of Black women through cross-dressing began in the nineteenth-century Blackface minstrel show. First introduced by Dan Gardner in 1835, the wench caricature was a staple of the minstrel show (Mahar 95-6). Either through character, skit, or song, White men performed as Black women sometimes through the blackening of skin and donning of female apparel. The manner Black women were portrayed in minstrels, however, varied from the yaller gal to the grotesque wench. The yaller gal was considered a “beautiful female figure” that represented lighter-skinned Black women and was an aspect of the homoerotic nature of cross-dressing on the theater stage. The grotesque wench represented the comically ugly, absurd, unappealing, and almost inhumane aspect of Black women that was undeniably understood to be a male in female garb (Mahar 159).

Cross-dressing Black men, similar to their White male predecessors, control Black female bodies through mockery in performance. The yaller gal and Geraldine are flirts that reaffirm the overtly sexual, or Jezebel stereotype, of Black women. The grotesque wench, Wanda, and Rasputia, are detestably ugly and animal-like and they represent a type of grotesque humor that allows for the degradation of black women. Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interest* states, “the black male comedian was here empowered by his female double” and, therefore, the BMW could “get away with things that were still transgressive” for the Black male comedian performer (Garber 274). Within their performances, these men, both Black and White, are able to gain power through shaping Black women as spectacles of humiliation and humor and, for some of these characters, they attempted to directly dictate female behavior. For example, several characters, such as Rasputia, Sheneneh, and Madea, offered direct advice to actual female characters on how to be better women. As Trudier Harris states, “The Black American Woman has had to admit that...everybody...felt qualified to explain her, to even herself” (4). Of the BMW characters, Rasputia, Sheneneh, and Madea, Madea is the most direct in this manner counseling women throughout the film via direct advice and action. Rachel Jessica Daniel states that this aspect of the character is why Madea is very popular among a mainly Black female audience. She asserts that Madea “has the ability to speak to the various needs of

those in the audience” (130). Daniel further argues that Madea is able to offer both a male and female perspective to the audience members. This type of maternal or girlfriend-like role can also be seen with other BMWs. For example, Sheneneh offered advice to actual women characters on the show on various topics including how to please their man and beauty. Essentially, these black men are using their female roles to dictate and influence actual Black women’s behavior.

Black female stereotypes have also contributed greatly to the characteristics of the BMW. The Sapphire, Jezebel, and Mammy stereotypes are often the main descriptors placed on these cross-dressed performances. True, the BMWs exhibit characteristics representative of these negative labels such as the bad bitch attitude of the Sapphire, the large girth of the Mammy, and the overtly flirtatious and sexual Jezebel (Chen et al. 115-35; West; Goldman et al.; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes*; LeBesco 231-42; Anderson). Since several of these cross-dressed characters overlap within these stereotypes, LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant argues that the “composite figure” should be labeled “sapphmammibel,” essentially a “hybridization of Sapphire, Jezebel, and Mammy” (56-69). Furthermore, some of the newer stereotypes of Black women include the overly domineering matriarch, the strong Black woman, and the angry Black woman, each of which has also been an aspect of these Black men’s portrayals (Springer 249-76; Collins 72-84). The BMW often reflects many of these controlling images.⁴ Cross-dressing is a major part of their humor and an important distinction as compared to other stereotypes often associated with Black women.

Conversely, several actors such as Tyler Perry, Martin Lawrence, and Flip Wilson have stated that they created their female characters to praise Black women. Wilson praised Geraldine: “She’s honest, she’s frank, she’s affectionate...liberated” (Lloyd). According to comedian Kevin Cook in his biography of Wilson, *Flip: The Inside Story of TV’s First Black Superstar*, Geraldine was named after Wilson’s childhood crush. Martin Lawrence refers to the Sheneneh character as reminiscent of his “niece and sisters” (Zook 57). Tyler Perry states that “Madea is a cross between my mother and my aunt and watching Eddie Murphy.... She is exactly the PG version of my mother and my aunt, and I

⁴ The Sapphire caricature parallels greatly with the BMW, since it was originally portrayed by a White man on the radio with the *Amos and Andy Show*, which aired from 1928-1960. However, the BMW has characteristics that go beyond the Sapphire caricature and, therefore, needs to be recognized as categorically different.

loved having an opportunity to pay homage to them” (“Tyler Perry Transforms”). Other Black actors who cross-dress do not profess such honorable intentions in their construction or portrayal of Black women. Regardless, it is hard to pay homage to characters like Wanda, Madea, and Sheneneh. Whitney Peoples so eloquently states, “[T]his appropriation of the Black female body...is rendered more caricature than homage” (cited in Manigault-Bryant, *Womanist* 151). Furthermore, these characters are intentionally absurd in demeanor and appearance. Regardless whether intended as homage or cruel parody, the origins of the BMW came out of a darker history of mockery and degradation of Black women.

“What You See Is What You Get”

An aspect of the humor of BMW characters is that everyone is participating in the joke. In cross-dressing, the audience is well aware that they are watching men perform as women. However, for the sake of the plot, the characters are accepted as women. Victoria Flanagan states that within the “male cross-dressing model, the authentic masculinity of the cross-dressing male subject is rarely in any genuine doubt. The characters of these narratives are first and foremost ‘male,’ and their inherent masculinity permeates the cross-dressing context, even though they may appear outwardly female” (50). These performances are not analogous to drag queens or queer identities.⁵ The complexity of males performing in female masquerade is too often placed under the broad category of drag. Roger Baker specifically asserts that drag is “about many things...it is about men’s fear of women as much as men’s love of women and it is about gay identity” (18). For example, dragged performances of such Black men as Wesley Snipes in *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995) and Ving Rhames in *Holiday Heart* (2000) depicts these Black men as gay characters that perform in drag shows. In both dragged films, the main characters are seen throughout their transition from male to female back to male.⁶ However, it is rare to view the

⁵ Marybeth Hamilton argues in the chapter titled “I’m the Queen of the Bitches’: Female Impersonation and Mae West’s *Pleasure Man*,” in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies in Cross-Dressing* speaks directly to the concept that female impersonation has an automatic association with “queerness.”

⁶ Similarly, *Juwanna Mann* (2002), *Tootsie* (1982), and *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) depict the transition from male to female as a part of the plot of the respective films.

changeover by those portraying the BMW. One exception may be seen in the film *Big Momma's House* (2000) and *Big Momma's House 2* (2006). The main character, portrayed by Lawrence, is a cop that must go undercover as Big Momma, a robust Black woman and, therefore, dons a fat suit and female clothing to catch criminals. While portraying Big Momma, Martin Lawrence takes special care to reject male sexual advances and instead shows interest in a female character, Shelly (Nia Long).

The cross-dressing of Black men in these comedic roles has not been used to create sexual desirability of characters. Since the audience must accept the BMW as a woman within the role, that character is often portrayed as possessing an attraction to men.⁷ The BMW may be either at the center of desire of men or the initiator of their desire for men. However, this yearning is rarely satisfied. The BMW may be constructed to be unappealing and ugly. However, if the BMW is somewhat attractive, then there is rarely an intimate relationship with men. This was evident within the parody of *Skank Robbers*. The audience was told the film was produced by the makers of *Godzilla* and *Planet of the Apes*, and the BMWs were specifically referred to as “ugly,” which was not only used as a comedic gesture but used to emphasize that these characters are so unattractive as to be animal-like. Sheneneh, Wanda, Madea, and Rasputia are constructed to be sexually unappealing and are constantly referred to as ugly by other characters. Sheneneh’s unrequited sexual desire is toward the main character, Martin Payne. Both characters are portrayed by Martin Lawrence. Sheneneh may occasionally have a love interest; however, intimacy with a man (or woman) is never viewed. Perry created a background of Madea as being a stripper in her younger years, but due to her age, girth, masculine appearance, and demeanor, the BMW background is used more to add to her humor rather than sexual allure (Tyler Perry, “Taking Madea”). With Foxx’s Wanda, ugliness is the main plotline of every skit in which the character appears. As a guest on *The Dating Game*, Wanda, while behind a partition, flirts with the three male contestants. Upon the removal of the partition, the winning contestant attempts to physically assault Wanda and then refers to *her* as a beast. Later, he is eventually thrown over the shoulder of the BMW as she

⁷ Several scholars such as E. Patrick Harris and David Moody have reviewed the relationship between cross-dressing Black comedians and homosexuality. It has been argued that several comedians, more particularly Eddie Murphy, are expressing their own homosexuality through cross-dressing and anti-homosexual rhetoric.

states, “I got you and I am ready to go” (“*Ugly Woman Dating Show*”). Both Wanda and Sheneneh were constructed to be ugly and unappealing, reminiscent of their wench predecessor. Although the cross-dressed performances may depict the latest fashions in clothes and hair, as does Sheneneh, or wear extremely tight and short dresses or lingerie, as does Wanda, these characters are neither meant to be truly sexually appealing to male (or female) audiences nor are they fetishized in any manner.⁸ However, there are two outliers, Rasputia and Geraldine.

Louie Robinson describes Geraldine Jones as having a “chestnut face that is immaculately coiffed. The figure—reportedly a size 12 but perhaps closer to a 14...the legs are pretty good, especially in those rather shockingly tinted stockings of fuchsia and chartreuse...and everybody knows she don’t take no stuff” (176). Robinson highlights Geraldine’s basic characteristics of being fashionable and having a quick wittiness and sassiness which is ever present in the BMW (Robinson 176). Wilson’s character differs greatly from its BMW progenies. This character is not meant to be ugly in any way. Geraldine was a flirt that seemed to be desired, often humorously, by the famous male guests such as Bill Cosby, Harry Belafonte, Tim Conway, and Burt Williams. However, if they ever get too close, she quickly puts them back in their place with her staple phrase of “Don’t you touch me,” which is asserted in various iterations. Geraldine is essentially constructed as a tease (Garber 298). Flip Wilson’s desire to make Geraldine sexually appealing is evident in the manner in which NBC censors expressed concern over the large bust size of the character, which resulted in it being reduced several cup sizes (Cook 123). However, to avoid sexual tension and to respect the sensibilities of 1970s television audiences, Geraldine’s boyfriend, Killer, who is never seen, forbids Geraldine from having physical intimacy with the male guests. Geraldine’s teasing of the celebrity male guests, which can range from flirtatious compliments and comments to slight touches, is framed within the comedy in such a way so that the audience never truly believes there is any attraction to her.

Rasputia may be representative of one of the most grotesque and sexual types of BMWs. The extremely ugly and obese character is often scantily clad in a lingerie or bikini and is very sexually aggressive. Rasputia is sexually active. She has sex with either her husband Norbit (also portrayed by Eddie Murphy) or her dance instructor Buster Perkin (Marlon Wayans), with whom she has an affair. In

⁸ Reference to the trend-setting Sheneneh was mentioned by Cheryl Thompson in “Black Women, Beauty, and the Hair as a Matter of Being,” *Women’s Studies*, vol. 38, no. 8, 2009, pp. 831-56.

both scenarios, the sex is connected to intimidation. With Norbit, their sex is aggressive and violent. The dance instructor grants Rasputia sex so that he receives favors from her. In many ways, Rasputia is a rapist. In several sex scenes, Rasputia is in lingerie and runs to jump on Norbit for sex. He looks terrified and disgusted. Rasputia dominates Norbit through fear, violence, and intimidation, similar to her relationship with other characters. Furthermore, her personality is only second to her being detestably ugly and fat. In one scene, Rasputia is at a water park in a bikini. Due to her size, park officials question whether she is wearing bikini bottoms since her stomach conceals her genitalia. In response, Rasputia lifts her fat flabs to expose a bikini bottom. Rasputia is the complete opposite of another female character in the film *Kate Thomas* (Thandie Newton), who is depicted as extremely kind, beautiful, and quite thin. Although Rasputia is an extremely sexual BMW that has physical, sexual relationships with men, her sexuality is completely grotesque. The sexual availability or allure (or rather lack thereof) of the BMWs from Geraldine to Rasputia is closely tied to the continual representations of machismo.

Masculinity is only thinly veiled by the audience's imagination, light makeup, and, occasionally, prosthetics, and female clothing. However, physical and cultural gestures of socially constructed ideologies of masculinity, or rather Black masculinity, are major aspects of the BMW character construction. Geraldine is often known for stating "What you see is what you get." However, it is not that simple. It is not uncommon for the BMW's voice to drop from a falsetto to their deeper male voice within a performance or for there to be visible signs of facial hair or periodic displays of extreme physical strength. Tyler Perry is notoriously known for switching to his normal baritone voice while performing Madea (Daniel 123). In an episode of *Martin*, Sheneneh takes a basketball from the character Tommy, and, to retrieve this ball, Tommy has to challenge Sheneneh's basketball skills. In the end, Tommy is unable to get the ball, and, due to her sports ability, Sheneneh is invited to the court to play on his all-male team. An aspect, or rather stereotype, of Black masculinity, is the concept that Black men are good at sports, especially basketball.⁹ Therefore, Sheneneh's sports prowess was an aspect of her masculinity.

⁹ In an interview, actor Dustin Hoffman commented about the sexes after portraying a woman in the popular 1982 film, *Tootsie*. He defined poker as a "masculine sport," therefore demonstrating that it is not unusual for sports to be used as an activity to illustrate one's construction of masculinity. Furthermore, Jeffrey Lane in his 2007 book, *Under the Boards: The Cultural*

Assertions of masculinity in male cross-dressing are not unusual. Elaine Showalter's analysis of these intentional displays of masculinity by men while in female masquerade states that BMWs represent the "phallic woman," essentially asserting "masculine power while masking it" (116-8). However, when applied to Black masculinity, these visages of masculinity while in female masquerade also illustrate the fear of castration. Tommy Curry argues that since "*maleness* has come to be understood as synonymous with power and patriarchy and racially codified as white, it has no similar existential content for the Black male, who in an anti-Black world is denied maleness and is ascribed as feminine in relation to white masculinity" (6). Interestingly, the BMW is often attributed to the emasculation of Black men who perform these characters. However, characters such as Madea and Sheneneh express an assertion of masculinity or power they feel is unattainable within a White patriarchal society.

The BMW is aggressive to both men and women. The assertiveness may also manifest within characters through extreme attitude, anger, and even violence. bell hooks states that Black men "had to be taught that it was acceptable to use violence to establish patriarchal power," and, therefore, the violence seen within these characters is a part of attempting to obtain a White form of patriarchal power (3). In the case of Geraldine, a propensity toward violence or extreme aggression was redirected from the character to an ever-present but never visible boyfriend, Killer. In his name alone, it is evident that Flip Wilson is trying to portray a particular type of Black male. Killer is representative of the overly violent and aggressive black male characters in the Blaxploitation era that were quite popular during the *Flip Wilson Show's* airing. Although constructed as "liberated" by Wilson, Geraldine is a flirtatious smart-mouth who is always under the control of the invisible Killer. Wilson uses Killer to assert a distinct type of Black masculinity while he safely diverts from masculinity by donning a dress, heels, and makeup. Unlike other BMW's who are openly violent within their female guise, Geraldine disguises those traits through cross-dressing and projects it onto the unseen Killer. Therefore, there is no threat of Geraldine being labeled a Black brute, while Killer's aggression is disguised by his absence. Other BMWs are not as creative in their assertions of power.

Revolution in Basketball, examines the manner basketball, more specifically the National Basketball Association, has become associated with authentic Black masculinity.

One of Madea's main character traits is that she is violent. She is gun-toting and extremely large in height and weight (Perry is 6 feet and 5 inches in height). She will not hesitate to shoot or physically assault any person, Black or White, male or female. Madea is often referred to as *the* "mad Black woman." In fact, the film *Madea Goes to Jail* is based on the character going to prison due to her inability to control her anger. Within the film, the character is involved in a police chase, uses a machine gun to stop a party in her home, and uses a forklift to wreck a car parked in a parking spot Madea wanted. Throughout all iterations of Madea in film, television, and theater, this character's predominant personality trait is that she is short-tempered and violent.

Madea is not the only BMW that asserts herself through violence. Rasputia is an overweight character that intimidates and bullies everyone, regardless of race, gender, and age. Through her girth and simple brute strength, Rasputia is feared by every person in the film and is only defeated by a harpoon-style weapon thrown into her buttocks essentially equating her with an animal that needs to be put down. For Madea and Rasputia, an aspect of their brute strength is asserted through the use of fat suits, which assists in asserting their aggressive, often violent, behavior. However, not all BMWs are openly violent or fat. Regardless, violence, or some form of aggression of power, is a common characteristic of every BMW.

Lastly, similar to the wench caricature, the BMW represents a form of Blackface. Charlotte Coles asserts that cross-dressing "sustains forms of femininity which primarily serve patriarchal interests" (1-2). However, when race is an aspect of the performance, the female masquerade is complicated. The racism of the minstrel show is undeniable. Since the BMW is performed by Black men, it offers to the wider public some validity of their performance style. An aspect of female masquerade almost always contains some form belittling the female gender. However, the depictions of Black women by Black men also bring another dynamic to the performance—race. Similar to their White male predecessors in minstrel performances, the stereotypical construction of Blackness is an aspect of these BMW roles. While Blackface may not be applied in their performances, Black voice and other stereotypes are consistently used. Other Black stereotypes are present in every BMW from Geraldine to Madea through actions and in stereotypical Black dialect.

The BMWs often speak in exaggerated stereotypical Black dialect and engage in eye-rolling and loud, obnoxious behavior. These traits are quite reminiscent of

the wench caricature, whose performers typically donned Blackface and used exaggerated Black dialect. The minstrel-like performances of BMWs have been highlighted in scholarship for decades. Donald Bogle argues that Geraldine is “a collection of repackaged stereotypes” (*Primetime Blues* 180-81). Similarly, Kristal Brent Zook describes Sheneneh as “a stereotypical caricature of a ghetto ‘homegirl’” (57). Black director and writer Spike Lee refers to Tyler Perry’s character of Madea as a display of “coonery buffoonery” reminiscent of the nineteenth-century minstrel era (Izrael). A major sign that these characters are intentionally (metaphorically) donning Blackface is observed through the outlandish manner in which they are distinguished from other supporting characters. For example, Perry plays several roles in his Madea franchise films, which are always male. Within almost every supporting male role, Perry is constructed as possessing a professional career, as one who rarely uses slang, instead often speaking in a formal English dialect, and as an overall respectable man. Similarly, there is a major difference between the tuxedo donning, well-spoken host, Wilson, and the eye-rolling, hip-shaking, and strong, urban, racialized dialect of Geraldine. For every BMW, an aspect of their humor is Blackness, or rather a stereotypical idea of Blackness.

The Fallacy of the “Nut Pussy”

In October 2017, *Saturday Night Live* actor Jay Pharoah starred in the Showtime comedy series *White Famous*, which was based on the experience of fellow actor Jamie Foxx’s (Foxx, an executive producer, plays a version of himself) experience in Hollywood. The first episode introduces the main character Floyd Mooney (Pharoah) who is a comedian offered an opportunity to gain fame by appearing in a film in which he will have to cross-dress. Due to the history and controversy of Black men wearing dresses to be successful, Floyd dreams of meeting Foxx to discuss his apprehensions. At the meeting, he walks in on Foxx being straddled by a naked Black woman who is introduced as “just research,” while the sexual act continues in front of Floyd. Once their sexual intercourse is complete, Foxx reveals that he is donning a short red miniskirt. Then, Foxx lectures Floyd on the benefits of cross-dressing to become White famous. He states, “When I was thanking the academy, what mother fuckers didn’t know is I had my dress on under my suit,” insinuating that cross-dressing in Hollywood contributed to his fame. After convincing Floyd to put on a dress, Foxx turns him

toward a mirror and states, “You don’t let the dress define you...you define the dress.” Floyd lifts the dress which exposes that his genitalia is missing. Foxx responds, “Now you don’t actually think you have a dick anymore do you...soon as you put that dress on your dick goes away.” Now, according to Foxx, Floyd has a “nut pussy” which is a hairless, pubic area similar to Mattel’s Ken doll. The loss of his penis terrifies Floyd as he wakes from the dream (“Pilot”).

White Famous was canceled after one season and, overall, received mixed reviews. This first episode reflects a controversial issue concerning the concessions Black men make to gain fame in the White-dominated world of Hollywood. The central storyline focusing on Black men cross-dressing in comedy roles could have brought to the forefront serious discussions addressing Black masculinity and emasculation, popular images of Black women, and several other race and gender issues. Instead, this episode was filled with naked, silent Black women (within the first episode, at least three women are completely naked and used as sexual props) and “penile self-obsession” (Saraiya). Interestingly, both Jay Pharaoh, due to his various roles on *Saturday Night Live*, and Foxx (as the previously discussed Wanda from *In Living Color*), have both donned dresses throughout their careers and have received negative reactions due to these portrayals. However, the manner in which cross-dressing is presented within this episode is through vulgar references and the degradation of almost every woman in the episode. The fear of being perceived as homosexual due to cross-dressing also becomes apparent within the show. What becomes clear is that due to gaining a “nut pussy,” Black men must regain their masculinity, in this case, penis, through having open sexual relations with as many women as possible. Marjorie Garber states that the “nightmare vision, of the American black man as always already feminized and humiliated...keeps returning” and that this “image should coexist with another, apparently contradictory image, that of the black man who wields...sexual” power (271). Through sexual relations, Black men can regain the power that Black women as well as White men and White women stripped from them. They also can assert their heterosexuality through the use of women. It is evident that Black women are malleable objects. In *White Famous*, Black women are mere sexual props, and their naked bodies are used to titillate audience members. The use of Black women as sexual props asserts the masculinity and heterosexuality of those men within the series. Similarly, this malleability is transferable with Black men in dresses as the BMW. Black women can be used as objects of disgust, mockery, ridicule, and abuse however the men see fit.

Regardless of the scenario, Black men are gaining power through the degradation of Black women. As a result, Black men, or the Black Macho, can aggressively assert their ideals of Black masculinity within a White patriarchal society that has often ignored them or within a society in which they have felt neglected.

Struggle for power between Black men and Black women manifest in various ways throughout popular culture. Rapper Big Sean states in his song "Blessings": "My grandmother died I'm the man of the house." He explains: "You might say it don't make sense, but it makes total sense because where I'm from grandmas and moms and women are the man of the house, too" (Steinfeld). Big Sean is referring to the fact that many Black households have a matriarchal system. Although meant as a sign of reverence to women, the rapper brings to the forefront a major issue that has dominated the Black community for decades. In 1965, the Moynihan Report contributed greatly to the degradation of Black women and the added tension between Black men and Black women. The report stated that Black women "undermined male leadership and imposed a crushing burden on the Negro male" (Moynihan 113). Chanequa Walker-Barnes argues that the Moynihan Report contributed greatly to "this image that undergirds every Black male actor's decision to don a 'fat suit' and wig and to breathe life into the character of a dark-skinned, over-weight, sharp-tongued Black woman" (117). Although the belief that Black women are "too masculine" pre-dates this report, as Melissa Harris-Perry states the "Moynihan Report did not create the angry black woman stereotype. It tapped into an existing framework" in which Black women, once again, were seen as the major problem in the Black community (110-5). Therefore, if you relate this ideology to the BMW, then it is not the dress that causes Black men to be emasculated producing a "nut pussy" and it is not a White-dominated Hollywood system: it is Black women. Therefore, as a reflection of gender conflict, the BMW illustrates a demeaning portrayal of Black women that contributes to the Black man's fame while allowing for the expression of anger, bitterness, and strife towards Black women.

The recent conversations of a possible reboot of the 1990s hit comedy series *Martin* and with it a most likely resurgence of BMW Sheneneh Jenkins, is troubling. Further, the continual success of Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy, particularly associated with their cross-dressing, illustrates that although with great debate and controversy, the BMW is not going anywhere. Cross-dressing Black men in comedy have financial success and their characters are often quite popular. For years after the *Flip Wilson* variety show stopped airing, he was

constantly asked to perform Geraldine (Lloyd). Sheneneh and Wanda's parody movie trailer *Skank Robbers* was excitingly accepted by the public over 20 years after their respective shows ended. Perry's Madea is a media enterprise within itself or as one scholar observes is a "multi-hyphenate media juggernaut" (Sheppard 5). Clearly, BMW characters are popular. These characters, in varying degrees, are humorous. But what are we truly laughing at? An aspect of their humor will always be that they demean Black women. Simply focusing on Black emasculation or Black female stereotypes is only the beginning of the conversation. Too often these characters are analyzed separately. This article hopes to broaden a dialogue to bring together those Black Macho Women that consistently appear in Black popular culture into a unified conversation.

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