

Take it Seriously: Bimbo Feminism and the Racialized Production of Erotic Capital on #BimboTok

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Abstract: Bimbo feminism, a particular feminist ideological framework rooted in the reclamation of hyperfemininity and bodily autonomy, is in part concerned with critiquing the historical whiteness of many strains of feminism, and its ensuing heteropatriarchal and anti-trans sentiments (Haigney, 2022). As these exclusionary dimensions of white-centric feminism persist in various feminist movements today, Bimboism is uniquely placed within contemporary feminist movements to weave together resistance to heteropatriarchal hegemony. A common critique, however, of the bimbo trend is that it is largely adopted by an overwhelmingly white crowd across social media platforms (Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Pierce, 2022; Sunder, 2021). While scholarship has covered the emergence of BimboTok and its rise to popularity (Granados, 2021; Haigney, 2022; Pierce, 2022; Rosaria & Wijaya, 2022), this presents a unique opportunity to further explore bimbo feminism and its entanglements with race. In this paper, we investigate how bimbo feminism (as it is circulated on TikTok) reframes erotic capital (Hakim, 2011; Montemurro & Hughes, 2024) through disidentificatory hyperfemininity, and how the platform logics of TikTok differentially racialize this practice. This exploration will be figured into a larger discussion on the ways that digital cultural production can “disseminate, incorporate, and commodify” cultural forms and content from the edges of dominant, mainstream society and culture (Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2013, p. 180), demonstrating that bimbo feminism both focalizes and subvert the pervasive norms of whiteness.

Keywords: [Social media](#), [femininity](#), [race](#), [popular culture](#)

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Introduction

Bimbo feminism, a particular cultural and aesthetic feminist framework rooted in the reclamation of hyperfemininity and bodily autonomy, is in part concerned with critiquing the historical whiteness of many strains of feminism and its ensuing heteropatriarchal and anti-trans sentiments (Haigney, 2022). As these exclusionary dimensions of white-centric feminism persist in various feminist movements today, bimboism is uniquely placed within contemporary feminist movements to weave together resistance to heteropatriarchal hegemony.

Intersectionality, a foundational concept of contemporary feminism and feminist theory, is woven into the grounding principles of bimbo feminism. At its core, Kimberlé Crenshaw has defined intersectional feminism as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz, 2020). Though many content creators of the bimbo trend actively resist the superstructures of heteropatriarchal hegemony, a common critique of the trend is that it is largely adopted by an overwhelmingly white crowd across social media platforms (Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Pierce, 2022; Sunder, 2021). While scholarship has covered the emergence of BimboTok and its rise to popularity (Granados, 2021; Haigney, 2022; Pierce, 2022; Rosaria & Wijaya, 2022), the entanglements of bimbo feminism and race remain a critical gap.

In this paper, we conduct a conceptual study of the bimbo figure that has emerged across digital social media platforms by exploring how the embodiment of hyperfemininity acts as both critique and subversion. We complicate and disentangle the concept of beauty by exploring the racial complexities of bimbo feminism through putting three main theoretical frameworks in conversation with each other: intersectional feminism

(Ahmed, 2017; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981; Hoskin & Blair, 2024), erotic capitalism (Hakim, 2011; Montemurro & Hughes, 2024), and biopower (Foucault, 1976; Nguyen, 2011). These frameworks, in addition to our methodological approach consisting of digital dwelling and technocultural discourse analysis, will afford us the theoretical fulcrum to answer our research questions: How does putting erotic capitalism in conversation with bimbo feminism reveal the intersectional and racial dynamics of the trend? How do the racial and ethnic dynamics of bimbo feminism focalize and/or subvert the pervasive effects of bodies as consumption? Bolstered by these critical theoretical and methodological approaches, we explore how bimbo feminism, as it appears on the social media platform TikTok, reframes erotic capital through disidentificatory hyperfemininity, and how platform logics differentially racialize this practice. This exploration will be figured into a larger discussion on the ways that digital cultural production can “disseminate, incorporate, and commodify” cultural forms and content from the edges of dominant, mainstream society and culture (Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2013, p. 180), demonstrating that bimbo feminism both reproduces normative whiteness and enables openings for queer and feminist political and cultural critique of dominant heteropatriarchal conceptions of femininity.

Bimbo Feminism, Black Feminist Thought, and Erotic Capitalism

Though girlboss feminism as “a kind of hyperambitious you-can-have-it-all feminism” certainly has its value and its place, young women across social media platforms have been embracing and reclaiming hyperfemininity and frivolity as powerful and subversive expressions of mediated femininity (Haigney, 2022, para. 6). Bimbo feminism, existing in a corner of the internet coined “BimboTok,” responds to the Generation Z and millennial disillusionment with capitalism and the desire to have it all by actively pushing back against the “idea that women shouldn’t have to prove their economic worth or intelligence as a way of arguing for their self-worth and independence” (Haigney, 2022, para. 7). Bimbo feminism welcomes playful expressions of femininity that subvert what is accepted as normative femme bodies. Subversion of the normative is, in part, achieved through disidentificatory engagement with norms of gender and affect (Pierce, 2022, p. 201). Drawing from queer theory and gender studies, namely José Esteban Muñoz (1999), AP Pierce (2022) frames disidentification as the process through which a minoritized subject subverts power structures by “tactically and simultaneously work[ing] on, with, and against a cultural form” (p. 201–2). This entails absorbing norms of dominant culture in ways that “resignify” such norms and in doing so, reveals the “universalizing and exclusionary machinations” of power structures in order to feel and act empowered (Pierce, 2022, p. 202). Pierce understands bimbohood specifically as employing a process of disidentification to flip the misogynistic and pejorative use of the word “bimbo” on its head.

This is exemplified in TikTok creator Chrissy Chlapecka’s viral videos on bimboism, where she defines what it means to identify as/with a bimbo. Chlapecka’s definition of the “new age bimbo” rewrites the dominant script of the bimbo as a vapid, unintelligent, hyperfeminine woman, and instead is reimagined on TikTok as a politically active leftist. This reimagination of the bimbo extends the political potential of using the aesthetics of hyperfemininity, such as pastel pinks, frills, bows, and shiny lip glosses that relegate the aesthetics of the “girly girl” into the realm of unseriousness, for a distinctly political purpose. For Chlapecka, the

new age bimbo breathes new life into the existing figure of the bimbo—she reveals in her TikToks that the main characteristics of the new age, or Generation Z, bimbo to be a leftist, anti-capitalist and an ally for her “girls, gays, and theys” (Chlapecka, 2020). Chlapecka states that a bimbo doesn’t exist for and because of the misogynistic male gaze; instead, she embodies bimboism for her own gaze and thus exemplifies a liberating self-acceptance and celebration of her own femininity. In making such open remarks on the polemics of the male gaze and sex-positivity, bimbos like Chlapecka encourage other women to take pleasure in simply existing as a woman in the world as a way to express and challenge contemporary notions of femininity, identity, and agency (McWebb & Luan, 2024).

Though bimbo feminism may inherit from the neoliberal logics of highly visible popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Butler, 2013; McRobbie, 2009), it is conceptualized as distinctly anti-capitalist and concerned with collective liberation. An advocate for queer voices, the bimbo foregrounds the body as a site of personal and political resistance, evoking a crucial and enduring pillar of intersectional feminism. bimboism is as much about reclaiming hyperfemininity to comment on and resist, the dominant norms of how people should exist in and present femme bodies as it is about feminine joy. Everyday expressions of femininity and the self-actualization that occurs with choosing to express hyperfemininity in the way that exists in cultural trends like bimboism thus epitomizes the political as personal, because at its core is a critical nature that is intertwined with individual identity. To be truly intersectional, though, it is necessary to consider that many representations of bimboism across platforms are largely white women who fit within media-centric conventional beauty standards; however, as bell hooks’s (1981) writings reveal, femininity is not a monolith: it is deeply influenced by intersecting systems of oppression that shape social constructions and performances of race, class, and sexuality.

Drawing from Patricia Hill Collins (1990), we weave an intersectional feminist lens into our analysis of bimbo feminism, as it is crucial to acknowledge the foundations of Black feminist thought in the conceptualization of intersectionality. Social thought produced by Black feminists is designed to focus on collective oppression and liberation. It is because Black feminist thinking has always already existed in a political context that challenges its existence, Collins argues for understanding its theoretical formulation as a critical social theory (Collins, 1990, p. 4). It is within this understanding of Black feminist theory that we situate the critique that the bimbo movement makes of heteronormative, white, male, patriarchal domination as a primary driver of social inequality.

Further, bell hooks (1989) noted that a crucial part of feminist theory is to distill abstract theory and articulate it in a way that may resonate with all groups who are oppressed, colonized, or exploited, as “moving from silence to speech” is a gesture of defiance that can and should occur as a collective (p. 9). This is mirrored in Collins’s (1990) feminist thought, where Black feminism necessitates “searching for its own expression in alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals” (p. 14). Across the bimbo feminist social media trend, talking back as defiance can be recognized in the way that users stitch, duet, and collaborate to deconstruct the heteropatriarchal politics that have built up normative expectations of acceptable femininity. Though the bimbo movement prioritizes self-actualization

through a reclamation of the feminine, a bimbo needs their community so that they can talk back together.

Bringing the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality into conversation with bimbo feminism allows us to interpret key elements of Black feminist thought for the purpose of interrogating where intersectionality appears in bimboism. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) mentions that a key dimension of developing Black feminist thought is the reinterpretation of existing ideas and works through new theoretical frameworks. In putting the aspects of Black feminist theory that have founded intersectional critical social thinking together in a conversation about biopower and erotic capital, we present a unique framework through which to analyze the new age bimbo, thereby providing a critical dimension to previous understandings of the bimbo and her political potential.

Informed by Rachel E. Molko's (2023) sentiment of the physical and material elements of iconicity and discursive strands, our methodology blends together both digital dwelling (Wiens, 2021; Wiens & MacDonald, 2024) and critical technocultural discourse analysis (Brock, 2018) to analyze BimboTok through the six main elements of erotic capital (Hakim, 2010). We orient ourselves to our data via Molko's (2023) understanding of internalized misogyny as a "cultural configuration" produced and instilled by hegemony and patriarchy specifically, and that femininity can be construed, performed, and embodied to critique this hegemonic cultural configuration as a method of contradiction and resistance, rather than only existing as the counterpart to masculinity (p. 15). To collect our data, we surveyed the social media platform TikTok to gather a small, curated data set (Gajjala et al., 2024; Wiens & MacDonald, 2024) indicative of the kaleidoscopic racial dimensions of bimbo feminism on #BimboTok. Digital dwelling affords us the embodied, affective, and reflexive approach to lingering with our layered research scene, while a critical technocultural discourse analysis of our data will show the overlapping of the material, practical, and discursive in the way that bimbo content creators "perceive, articulate, and ultimately define the technocultural space in which they operate and exist" (Brock, 2018, p. 1016).

Biopower and Erotic Capitalism

A bimbo's subversion of the existing heteropatriarchal erotic capital demonstrates how a countersentimentality is produced through the embodiment of bimboism. Bimboism, at its core, is concerned about the body's power as a site of political resistance and as a locus of hyperfemininity. Following Michel Foucault's (1990) conceptualization of biopower as an intensification of the body with an intensification for pleasure, we turn to Mimi Ti Nguyen (2011), who expands on this to focus on how beauty can be theorized within biopower. Nguyen argues, "To take beauty seriously is to elaborate on its force as biopower, to which the hope that beauty might enliven us all would seem to lead" (p. 364). The privileging of beauty and its weighty marker of social status has continually been a tour de force of power. Bimboism, and its attachment to beauty as "a political issue—a matter of dignity," throttles the patriarchy's perception of hyperfemininity and sexuality (Nguyen, 2011, p. 364). With bimboism's emphasis on the body as a site of personal and political resistance, the bimbo inherits a philosophical consciousness of the body as an aesthetic and political site of intervention that critiques the vices of sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia. Bimboism outwardly declares a stamp of refusal against the nation's incarceration of the female body with leftist ideologies of bodily auton-

omy (Chlapecka, 2020). The body, as Nguyen has argued, is an important site of “signification, power, and knowledge about how to live” (p. 364). Bimbo feminism is concerned about the body’s signification, power, and knowledge to express freely beyond a heteropatriarchal society. The bimbo aesthetic embodies hyperfemininity as independent, rather than a counterpart to masculinity, thereby critiquing dominant patriarchal standards of the body through biopower and erotic capitalism.

The term ‘erotic capital’ has received much attention from gender, sexuality, and sociology scholars (Hakim, 2011; Montemurro & Hughes, 2024). Erotic capital is the “usable characteristics that make someone sexually desirable in specific contexts” (Montemurro & Hughes, 2024). According to sociologist Catherine Hakim (2011), erotic capital has six distinct elements: beauty, sexual attractiveness, social flirtations, liveness, social presentation, and sexuality (p. 500). Hakim argued that erotic capital is a “combination of aesthetic visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts” (p. 501), but the new age bimbo would severely oppose appealing to members of the opposite sex. While the presence of erotic capital is highly visible in labour markets, the media, politics, advertising, the arts, and in everyday social interactions (Hakim, 2011), these contexts are further complicated by the patriarchal features of society that “inhibit women from exploiting their erotic capital to achieve economic and social benefits” (Hakim, 2011, p. 507). While Hakim’s six tenets of erotic capitalism are instrumental in conceptualizing the relationality between feminism, culture, and sexuality, bimboism operates within the erotic capitalism framework to actively subvert its hegemonic sentiments. That is, bimboism subverts the erotic capitalism framework by ‘looking’ from a feminist and critical gaze (Koch, 1985; Riley et al., 2016). By ‘looking’ from these angles, bimboism ultimately enacts a liberation of poignant erotic power, erecting full agency and self-empowerment. Erotic power, as Audre Lorde (1978) writes, “offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.” A bimbo does not fear erotic power, for erotic power is unleashed in temporal, cultural, and sensual corners of everyday life. In the following sections, we explore how the six elements of erotic capital are reframed under bimboism.

The precedence of beauty is certified as the first and “central element” of erotic capital (Hakim, 2011). Perceptions of beauty are malleable through cultural and temporal variations of society, and beauty standards ebb and flow through time (Hakim, 2011). In the world of bimboism, though, beauty is licensed from the enclaves of hyperfemininity and sexuality. Self-identified bimbo and TikTok creator Chrissy Chlapecka (2024) (re)affirms the liberating power of acknowledging beauty in her 14-second TikTok video, “ANYWAY.” In this clip, Chlapecka lip syncs to her song, “I’m Really Pretty,” while moving the camera in different angles as a form of “choreography.” Chlapecka sings the chorus of her song:

I’m really pretty, you wanna kiss me
 Oh, yeah, I’m perfect from my head down to my kitty
 Oh, it’s a pity, you want a quickie?
 Oh, that’s so tricky, I’m so busy ‘cause I’m pretty

Plastered on the video is a block of text that says:

news flash women can sing about being pretty / being scandalous and it doesn't make them misogynistic it just makes me think you hate yourself when you get mad over literally nothing.

Chlapecka's news flash blaringly calls out the patriarchy and the misogynistic attitudes that wage against women in the pockets of everyday life. A bimbo's disposition about beauty is not about conforming to a male optic; rather, a bimbo's telltale signification of power is to (re)claim perceptions of beauty for self-empowerment, a nod to Hakim's idea of a cultural and temporal variation of beauty.

Under the second tenet of erotic capital, sexual attractiveness is attributed to "personality and style, femininity or masculinity, a way of being in the world, a characteristic of social interaction" (Hakim, 2011, p. 500). As Chlapecka states in her debut video, "Damn, my tits look good," the suppression of female beauty and sexuality has been muted by the sirens of the patriarchy; however, the sirens of the patriarchy are readily silenced by a (re)orientation of the optics. That is, bimboism's focus on blurring the optics of the male gaze by sharpening the optics of the bimbo's own gaze sharply critiques the mainstream sexual signifiers of policing women's bodies.

Social interaction, the third tenet of erotic capitalism, is dramatized to characteristics of flirting, which include "grace, charm, social skills in interaction, the ability to make people like you, feel at ease and happy, want to know you, and, where relevant, desire you" (Hakim, 2011, p. 500). While the bimbo figure has been critiqued for catering the bimbo's hyper-feminine aesthetic to the male gaze, a bimbo would say that they are "conscious of their own frivolity, and that it is precisely the hyper-feminine, yet politically critical, commentary that satirizes the heteronormative expectations of someone who may present as a bimbo" (McWebb & Luan, 2024). A bimbo would say, "I don't do this for the misogynistic male gaze, I do it for my gaze" (Chlapecka, 2020).

Cheeky, satirical, and comedic, a bimbo's liveliness is a *mélange* of "social energy and good humor" (Hakim, 2011, p. 500). Residing in the sentiments of third-wave feminism, the bimbo's humorous overtures are strung together with melodies of "sharp-edged satire or light-hearted laughter" (Ferriss & Young, 2008, p. 93). The sharp-edged political satire of the bimbo's leftist commentary punctures the production of right-wing political discourse. For example, TikTok creator Ve'ondre Mitchell places her phone on the floor as she proceeds to aggressively "stomp" on Trump supporters. Mitchell's exaggerated stomp on her phone enacts Muñoz's disidentificatory turn, to strategically speak directly against the power structures of right-wing political discourse that promote regressive heteropatriarchal politics. Episodes of satire, humor, and comedy is precisely a nod to the bimbo's political stance of being a "leftist" who is "pro-sex work, pro-Black Lives Matter, pro-LGBTQ+, pro-choice, and will always be there for her girls, gays, and theys" (Chlapecka, 2020).

The material artifacts of a bimbo are marked by the nostalgic sentimentalities of Juicy Couture, Playboy bunnies, and Bratz Dolls: a throw-back to the iconic Y2K aesthetic. In the collection of BimboTok videos we have encountered, these nostalgic artifacts are reminiscent of the early bimbos, for example, the pink-clad Elle Woods from the movie *Legally Blonde* (2001). Effervescent shades of pink are precisely a bimbo's

primary colour palette. Dolled up in pink clothing and accessories, the bimbo's distinctive taste for pink shades has become a bimbofied cultural signifier. While these nostalgic artifacts are largely celebrated, it is also necessary to critically assess the flip side of these cultural emblems. In recent years, former girlfriends of Playboy founder, Hugh Hefner, have spoken out about the mistreatment, exploitation, and objectification of women at the Playboy mansion (Dastagir, 2022). Scholars have also cited Bratz Dolls as catalysts for body dysmorphia and eating disorders (Anschutz DJ & Engels RC, 2010; Levesque, 2010). Perhaps one of the most telltale emblems of bimboism is indeed the Playboy bunny, which debuted in 1960 and empowered “women to embrace their sexuality and liberate them from the sexual repression of the Fifties” (Barlow, 2021). Alicia Amira, a real life self-proclaimed bimbo doll embraces the motto of the Playboy bunny and “adapts the way she performs, and that sexually she can function as submissive, dominant and everything in between” (Hjer-mind, p. 24). These cultural signifiers and material artifacts of the bimbo aesthetic are a nod to aptitudes of the Y2K era, and yet still need to be put into conversation with the lineages of such material and cultural signifiers within the realm of women's subjectivities. Within the context of bimbo feminism, though, this nostalgic aesthetic embraces these cultural emblems to reclaim hyperfemininity, girlishness, and frivolity for the purpose of rupturing the misogynistic male gaze. By reframing the second-wave feminist phrase “the personal is political” in an intersectional and digital context, the emphasis on self-actualization subverts phallogocentric norms through conscious frivolity and cheeky comedic commentary (McWebb & Luan, 2024). The dichotomy of feminist theory, as Hakim (2011) argues, suggests that a woman is either valued for her human capital (cerebral capacities) or for her erotic capital (beauty) (p. 511). bimboism, though, is not measured via an either/or scale: a bimbo can fondly embrace both human capital and erotic capital.

Bimboism and Racialized Cultural Production

The reproduction of whiteness and white femininity in the bimbo movement is hypervisibilized with conventional features of the bimbo—a skinny, white woman with blond hair and blue eyes (Deliovsky, 2008; Reilly, 2024). Thus, “the white capitalist patriarchal compulsion to adopt styles and attitudes consistent with an imposed white feminine aesthetic” requires an urgent reconceptualization of bimboism's racial dimensions (Deliovsky, 2008, p. 50). In this section, we examine bimbo feminism through the lens of racialized cultural production, showing how platform logics racialize erotic capital and shape who is visible, monetized, and sanctioned. Specifically, we ask: How can we understand race and bimboism through racialized cultural production? Following David Hesmondhalgh and Anamik Saha's (2013) affirmation that “cultural production in the modern world cannot be adequately understood without taking account of race and ethnicity, and their relation to oppression” (p. 180), we seek to interrogate how social structures of oppression and privilege undergird the spaces of BimboTok by prying open the entanglements of race and ethnicity within bimboism.

Ve'ondre Mitchell, a trans woman of colour and self-identified bimbo, remixes Chlapecka's debut bimbo video, “who is the gen z bimbo?” to create her own rendition of this video. Additionally, TikTok creator meka.maraschino lip syncs to a sound bite from Dolly Parton while glamming up in gloss. In dwelling with the curated data set of BimboTok videos, we have noticed an inverse directionality of racialized commo-

fication. That is, bimbos of colour are adopting the normative white bimbo's beauty norms and sound bites, which ultimately reifies whiteness as a marker of power (Deliovsky, 2008). Adopting beauty styles, attitudes, and behaviours consistent with a white feminine aesthetic reproduces the cultural discourse of "normative white femininity" and saturates BimboTok with ideologies of hegemonic feminine beauty (Bartky, 2003; Deliovsky, 2008). An intimate desire to gatekeep normative white femininity and whiteness is evident in a user's comment on meka.maraschion's video, "Please correct me if I'm wrong but isn't this cultural operation [sic] bc isn't this hairstyle original apart [sic] of white culture?" This user's comment foregrounds a searing reproduction of "the insidiousness that whiteness plays in constructing white femininity as normative" (Deliovsky, 2008, p. 51). Furthermore, the formation of this comment reinforces that marginalized women are "either noticeably absent in dominant cultural representations of beauty or when they are represented as whitified, 'contextualized in otherness' or distorted" (Deliovsky, 2008, p.56). The conflation of meka.maraschino conforming to whiteness is extracted in the user's comment, thereby (in)visibilizing her Blackness. Conversely, for new age bimbos like Ve'ondre Mitchell, who leverages the digital space of BimboTok to cultivate a safe space for queer and trans representation, racial diversity and genderqueerness are celebrated under the umbrella of the bimbo movement, illustrating how disidentification, for example, interrupts white normativity to create spaces of joy for queer people of colour. Although the inception of the bimbo emerged from cinematic adaptations for white consumerism, the new age bimbo prioritizes intersectionality through its core values of community and self-expression and creating a playful space for inclusivity.

Conclusion

Bimbo feminism is uniquely situated within contemporary feminist movements to weave together resistance against heteropatriarchal hegemony. On TikTok, bimbo feminism reframes erotic capital through disidentificatory hyperfemininity, and platform logics differentially racialize erotic capital and shape who is visible, monetized, and sanctioned. Oftentimes, platform logics reproduce normative whiteness even as they enable tactical openings for queer and trans creators of color. However, the digital space of BimboTok is leveraged by bimbos of color to cultivate a safe space for representation, racial diversity, and genderqueerness, illustrating how disidentification, for example, punctuates white normativity to create spaces of joy for queer people of colour.

The futurity of bimbo feminism and bimboism in general offers myriad new avenues of exploration, especially in the fields of Critical Race Theory (CRT), critical Internet studies, and digital rhetorics. Though we folded in an analysis of the aesthetic patterns of the bimbo feminism trend, further avenues of analysis might focus on the sonic aesthetics of bimboism, which would allow us to think critically about the discourse within soundscapes and the cultural ideologies that sound inhabits. Additionally, tracing the genealogy of bimboism through cinematic portrayals would also afford a fresh perspective of bimbo feminism through narrative explorations and character portrayals. What remains clear, though, is that bimboism is certainly here to stay, as in the words of drag queen Sugar, "a bimbo never dies."

Biography

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