

## Out of Many, One People? Representations of Female Masqueraders in the Jamaica Carnival on Facebook

*Un solo pueblo, a pesar de la diversidad. Representación de las mujeres disfrazadas del Carnaval de Jamaica en Facebook*

*Um povo apesar da diversidade. Representações de mulheres disfarçadas da Carnaval da Jamaica em Facebook*

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Recibido: 30 de diciembre de 2016.

Aprobado: 17 de mayo de 2017.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14482/memor.32.10257>

Citar como:

Barratt, K. (2017) Out of Many, One People? Representations of Female Masqueraders in the Jamaica Carnival on Facebook. *Memorias: Revista Digital de Arqueología e Historia desde el Caribe* (mayo-agosto), 178-199.



## Abstract

Like many Caribbean-style carnivals, the Jamaican carnival parade is dominated by women, and their representations in the media are controlled by the photographers who dictate how they are presented on social media platforms such as Facebook. Using a framework on representation and power in the media, the paper posits that photographers uphold hegemonic ideas about women's bodies when they decide who is featured in their Facebook photo albums. A content analysis examined images of the 2015 carnival parade from three Facebook albums and found that photographers preferred women who were slim, light skinned, outfitted in the skimpiest costumes, and engaged in a standing pose. These findings contradict Jamaica's national motto "Out of Many, One People" that promotes the idea of an all-inclusive society, but ignores the social stratifications that are rooted within the former plantation society. These divisions along the lines of ethnicity and class are ultimately translated to performance spaces where carnival, a cultural import, is positioned against dancehall which is Jamaica's primary cultural product.

*Key words: Kai Barratt, Jamaica, carnival, female masqueraders, Facebook, photographs.*

## Resumen

Al igual que muchos carnavales de estilo caribeño, el desfile de carnaval jamaicano está dominado por mujeres y sus representaciones en los medios de comunicación son controladas por los fotógrafos que dictan cómo se presentan en plataformas de medios sociales como Facebook. Utilizando un marco sobre representación y poder en los medios de comunicación, el documento postula que los fotógrafos defienden las ideas hegemónicas sobre el cuerpo de las mujeres cuando deciden quién aparece en sus álbumes de fotos de Facebook. Un análisis de contenido examinó imágenes del desfile de carnaval de 2015 de tres álbumes de Facebook y encontró que los fotógrafos prefirieron a las mujeres delgadas, de piel clara, vestidas con los trajes más lisos y comprometidas con una pose de pie. Estos hallazgos contradicen el lema nacional de Jamaica "Out of Many, One People", que promueve la idea de una sociedad con todo incluido, pero ignora las estratificaciones sociales que están arraigadas en la antigua sociedad de plantación. Estas divisiones a lo largo de las líneas de la etnicidad y la clase se traducen en última instancia a los espacios de rendimiento donde el carnaval, una importación cultural, se posiciona frente a dancehall, que es el principal producto cultural de Jamaica.

*Palabras clave: Kai Barratt, Jamaica, carnaval, mujeres mascaradas, Facebook, fotografías.*

## Resumo

Como muitos carnavais do estilo caribenho, o desfile de carnaval jamaicano é dominado por mulheres e suas representações na mídia são controladas pelos fotógrafos que determinam como são apresentados em plataformas de redes sociais como o Facebook. Usando um quadro sobre representação e poder na mídia, o artigo postula que os fotógrafos defendem idéias hegemônicas sobre os corpos das mulheres quando eles decidem quem aparece em seus álbuns de



fotos no Facebook. Uma análise de conteúdo examinou as imagens do desfile de carnaval de 2015 de três álbuns do Facebook e descobriu que os fotógrafos preferiam as mulheres magras, de pele clara, equipadas com os trajes skimpiest e envolvidas em uma pose permanente. Essas descobertas contradizem o lema nacional da Jamaica “Out of Many, One People” que promove a idéia de uma sociedade abrangente, mas ignora as estratificações sociais que estão enraizadas na antiga sociedade de plantação. Essas divisões, ao longo das linhas de etnia e classe, são traduzidas para os espaços de desempenho onde o carnaval, uma importação cultural, está posicionado contra o dancehall, que é o principal produto cultural da Jamaica.

*Palavras-chaves: Kai Barratt, Jamaica, carnaval, mascaras femininas, Facebook, fotografias.*

## Introducción

In 2009, the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica issued the following directive to local media outlets:

There shall not be transmitted through radio or television or cable services, any recording, live song or music video which promotes the act of ‘dagging’,<sup>1</sup> or which makes reference to, or is otherwise suggestive of ‘dagging’ or which publicly displays, simulates or instructs about sexually explicit activities or positions. (Jamaica Information Service, 2009)

Since this directive was issued, the carnival celebration has not been broadcast on local television stations because of the sexually suggestive *wining*<sup>2</sup> dances that are performed by the participants. As a result, persons often view the carnival vicariously on social media platforms such as Facebook, and through photographs posted on Facebook pages. Through decisions related to selecting of an image or photo, framing, and editing, photographers are positioned to dictate how female masqueraders in the Jamaica carnival are presented in photographers’ Facebook photo albums.

How the carnival in Jamaica is packaged for its online viewers and the meanings these representations bring to the cultural context of the festival is significant to the development of scholarship on popular culture and representations on social media. In this regard, the research identifies the physical features photographers pay attention to when capturing the image of female masqueraders, specifically skin color, body size, and positioning when they pose for the camera. It further examines the meanings these elements contribute to the construction of gender, ethnicity and class in Jamaica.

## Carnival in Jamaica

Carnival in Jamaica started as an import from Trinidad and Tobago which is the home to the largest carnival celebration in the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> Since 1955, students from Trinidad and Tobago and other Eastern Caribbean countries at The University of the West Indies, Mona campus in Jamaica would organize annual carnival activities which featured the student population. Beyond the boundaries of the Mona campus, the *Orange Carnival* materialized in 1976. This event was held six

- 1 *Dagging* refers to any provocative dance movements that simulate sexual activity particularly those that accompany dancehall music.
- 2 *Wining* is also a sexually suggestive dance in the Caribbean that involves the rotation of the hips and waist. It usually accompanies *soca* music, a popular dance music that dominates Trinidad and Tobago’s carnival celebrations.
- 3 This statement does not discredit the *Jonkonnu* festival in Jamaica, which can be traced to Western Africa and is celebrated during Christmas, and like carnival, it involves costumes, masking, dancing, and music.



weeks after the original Trinidad carnival (which occurs on the held two days before Ash Wednesday) and organized by a group of upper class Jamaicans who had participated in the original event (Brown, 2005). Jamaican musician Byron Lee was at the forefront of carnival activities in Jamaica where he targeted a group of participants from diverse economic backgrounds which lead to the formation of *Jamaica Carnival* in 1990. The festivities were held on the Sunday following Easter Sunday known as Divine Mercy Sunday.

By 2000, two main organizing forces of carnival co-existed in Jamaica- Byron Lee's *Jamaica Carnival*, which offered cheaper costumes and parties in an effort to include participants from all socio-economic groups- and the groups that formed *Bacchanal Jamaica* who emerged from Jamaica's wealthy class and offered a more elite experience with higher priced costumes and events. It is important to note that these were not government led activities. Both entities were self-financing and depended on corporate sponsorship. Failing health forced Byron Lee to opt out of the carnival towards the mid-2000s; he subsequently died in November, 2008. In the interim, Bacchanal Jamaica continued to dominate the street parade in corporate Kingston attracting mainly participants from the middle and upper classes. The event withered in strength and numbers until 2016 when Lee's daughter announced the decision to continue her father's vision with the return of Jamaica Carnival.<sup>4</sup>

The carnival parade attracts approximately 2500 participants who purchase a package that includes a costume and food and drink during the parade from Bacchanal Jamaica for approximately US\$300-500.<sup>5</sup> The costumes or *pretty mas* depict a specific theme but are usually composed of a bikini or a swimsuit and decorated with colorful feathers, beads, and sequins for women and swim trunks for men. This attire is now typical for many Caribbean carnivals. Persons also have the option to wear a t-shirt designed by Bacchanal Jamaica. From 10:00am to 5:00pm, revelers party along a designated route accompanied by music and are provided with drink and food. The procession culminates at Bacchanal Jamaica's home base, the *mas camp* for a final party.

## Framework: Color, Class, and Representation

Race, ethnicity and class are critical factors in the cultural context of Caribbean carnivals. Belinda Edmondson contended, "In the performance of the Jamaica carnival, a black country becomes momentarily *brown*" (1999, p. 71). Similar to

4 In December 2016, *Xodus Carnival* and *Xaymaca International* declared that they will be leading separate carnival parades in corporate Kingston separate from Bacchanal Jamaica.

5 These figures are applicable to the 2014-2016 period.





the Miss Jamaica beauty pageants and local tourism advertisements, Edmondson asserted the carnival did not represent the dominant Black Jamaica, but a more ethnically diverse population. This context is framed by Jamaica's history of slavery and its colonial past. Henriques (1951) observed Jamaican society was divided into the Black lower-class, the Colored middle-class, and the White upper-class (p. 115). By linking skin color to class, Henriques noted that one's skin color was determined by actual skin shade and hair texture, which were valued based on their closeness to European features. In the middle were the *Coloreds* or *Mulattoes* who were historically progenies of White men and Black women or White men and Colored women. This class was defined by the extent to which they inherited African or European features, with preference given to the latter. European rule left a legacy in its former colonies that became a source for social stratification linked to skin color that which is played out in various socio-cultural contexts.

Throughout the period of slavery, the division between Black and Colored women was obvious. Colored women were afforded more social benefits than Black women. Although shunned by White women, Colored women were valuable to White men as housekeepers and mistresses (Mohammed, 2000). This preference was evident in Tom Cringle's log where he described the women who took part in the *Jonkonnu* festival in the streets of Kingston in the nineteenth century:

But the beautiful part of the exhibition was the Set girls. They danced along the streets in bands of from fifteen to thirty. There were brown sets, and black sets and sets of all intermediate gradations of color. Each set was dressed pin for pin alike...I had never seen more beautiful creatures than there were amongst the brown sets- clear olive complexions, and the fine faces, elegant carriages, splendid figures- full, plump, and magnificent. (Scott, 1833, p. 245)

The desirability of the Mulatto or brown woman is captured in Cringle's description of the set girls. The preference for brown over Black has resulted in a complex social value system in modern Jamaica that has created meanings attached to skin shade and class that are visible in various aspects of its society.

As such, the carnival in Jamaica operates as a performance of this complexity through the creation of ethnic and class divisions: Black versus brown and lower class versus middle-class. Similar to the Colored ethnic category, brown describes those of mixed origin or those who display more European, and more recently, Asian characteristics. It also includes physical features such as light colored skin, which may be further categorized into various shades, along with a

straight or curly hair texture. Some brown persons may have a kinkier hair texture, but the primary defining characteristic is a light skin color.

These socio-ethnic discords also dictate who takes part and ultimately who is represented in the carnival. Brown (2005) suggested the high cost of participation ensured it was an “uptown affair” which excluded those from the lower classes. She also mentioned calypso and soca, as an opposition to dancehall and reggae, made the carnival appealing to the middle and upper classes. Consequently, the narratives developed about carnival tend to suit the values of the upper and middle classes. In this sense, the carnival, besides having a celebratory and oppositional nature, also reinforces socio-cultural divisions in participating societies.

Who is represented in the carnival then raises concerns about who holds the power to fix these representations and the meanings attached to them especially as it relates to ethnicity and class. Stuart Hall’s theories on representation and meaning are useful to contextualize these ideas. According to Hall (1997), representation involves the production of meaning through language. People understand the world in a similar way because of shared meanings. These shared meanings are converted into a shared language: words, sound, or images, which represent concepts in the “real” world (p. 18). Hall questioned where meanings come from and how they are constructed through representation, especially images seen through the media. Referring to Foucault’s position on discourse, Hall suggested knowledge is linked to power and therefore involves control and restrictions of meanings. In addition, power comes from multiple dominant sources and operates at various sites of social life. Ideology and power ultimately fix meanings, and the groups who circulate power control representations in the media. Hall’s framework on representation and power helps to examine notions about ethnicity and class in the Jamaican context that are circulated by structures and which ultimately determine the representation of female masqueraders in the photos.

## Research Method

First, a content analysis determined the frequency of certain physical features to establish the dominant representations in the images. The technique is valuable for research where textual content is, “a basis for analysis and interpretation” (Seale & Tonkiss, 2012, p. 460). A method that quantifies the results is not typically regarded as useful for studies on representations and meanings because research in culture usually focuses on deconstructing meaning, while quantitative figures construct meaning (Deacon, 2008). Consequently, it is believed to be without ecological validity and does not adequately represent the actual cultural context being

studied. Opposition to the method also views it as concerned with descriptions and not interpretations, meanings or effects (Seale & Tonkiss, 2012, p. 460). For this research, coding the features in the photographs was useful to establish frequency and to determine photographers' preferences when they capture women in the carnival. This frequency formed the basis for the examination of meanings attached to the images and who has the power to construct these meanings.

Using content analysis, three albums created on Facebook and dedicated to the 2015 street parade were assessed. These were from *Lehwego*, *Craig Harley Photography*, and *Sleek*- all publicly available.<sup>6</sup> The pages were selected because they offered a large number of photographs of the carnival parade in 2015. Only photographs that featured full body shots of female masqueraders during the parade were considered. In cases where more than one female masquerader was represented in an image, each subject was examined separately. Using these criteria, images of 177 female masqueraders were analyzed from *Lehwego's* Facebook page, 206 from *Craig Harley's* page, and 92 from *Sleek*. The analysis coded variables such as skin shade and body size. It also looked at the type of costume worn by the masquerader and her positioning in the photograph.

In a research project of this type, it is important to note that there is no universal standard for determining physical features because preconceptions and biases influence perceptions of what they look like. As a result, there would be subjectivity in any attempt to standardize physical features because human observers cannot judge them in the same way, so reliability had to be estimated. Seale and Tonkiss (2012) noted that inter-rater reliability is necessary for content analysis as it makes certain that codes correspond to content in a uniformed way (p. 461). To help with standardization in the study, each variable was accompanied by a description and sample image that guided the researchers during coding of samples. In this respect, inter-rater reliability assessed the degree to which different observers gave consistent estimates of the coding samples. Subsequently, there was substantial agreement among the three observers. In this sense, the carnival, besides having a celebratory and oppositional nature, also reinforces socio-cultural divisions in participating societies.

The quantitative figures from the content analysis were not accepted at face value, but analyzed further using interviews to explore ideas of power and representation. Investigating the frequency of certain features required the input from those

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<sup>6</sup> Consent to examine the images was not needed as the analysis only used photos from a public Facebook pages rather than from an individual's private Facebook account.



who controlled the process of representation along with those who are were represented. And in this regard, interviews were carried out in September 2015 with a photographer from each Facebook page and three female masqueraders.<sup>7</sup>

The interviews were guided by a list of 13 questions. The three photographers were asked about their preferences for a shot during the parade and what determined who they selected to photograph. It was important to enquire about the physical characteristics that did and did not appeal to them. They were also asked to respond to the claim that their images tend to feature masqueraders who were light skinned, slim, and outfitted in a certain type of costume. Finally, they were asked about the process of editing and selecting photos to post on their pages. At times, some of their responses were limited. In this case, they were probed more to explain certain statements. To some extent, they were aware that they value certain characteristics and influence what these images say about the carnival in Jamaica and who participates and does not participate.

In addition, interviews were done with three female masqueraders in March 2016 who took part in the carnival parade in 2015. The women had volunteered to be interviewed after a request was made on the researcher's public Twitter account. They were asked to describe the women they predominantly saw in the photos on Facebook and how they felt about the dominant physical features of those women. Also, they were questioned about how they perceived their own bodies and its presentation for the parade. It then narrowed in on their personal experiences as a masquerader in terms of their preparation through diet and exercise and their choice of costumes. Although not a representative sample, they gave a voice to some of the women in the photos that which helped to corroborate or dispute statements by the photographers.

Overall, the content analysis showed that the majority of the photos featured women who were young, light skinned, with long, curly, or straight hair. In addition, most of them were slim and outfitted in the skimpier costumes. The frequency of these physical traits also points to the traits that were not common in the photographs. Women who were older, dark skinned, with afro-kinky natural hair or locs were noticeably absent. In addition, there were very few plus sized women. And those who wore costumes that offered more coverage such as a whole piece or a t-shirt were not seen very often. The discussion, however,

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7 All interviewees signed a consent form to fulfill legal and ethical requirements of the study and allow the researcher to use their responses in the analysis. They were also assured that their confidentiality will be protected by not using their identity, and they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.



will specifically look at three variables: skin color, body size, and the female masquerader's position in the photo.

## Skin Shade: "Love me Browning"

Jamaican dancehall artiste Buju Banton rendition of his hit "Love mi me browning" (1992) had a popular chorus- *me love me car, me love me bike, me love me money and ting, but most of all me love me browning*, which highlighted notions about brown and not Black being the standard for beauty or attractiveness.<sup>8</sup> Buju later tried to redeem himself with the composition *Love Black Woman*, where he flipped the script by articulating expressing a similar yearning for dark skinned women. Unfortunately, he had already articulated a discourse about skin color and desirability that is a part of the Jamaican reality today. These ideas are reinforced by male performers of Jamaican popular music despite them being mostly from the Black lower class, emphasizing that in Jamaica "the browning still emerges as a prize for the black man" (Mohammed, 2000, p. 10). Buju's sentiments make up a larger discourse where Black women's desirability is Othered to the prize of White female sexuality. Brown represents a closeness to White and therefore carries similar values. These values include being passive, willing to please, and monogamous. It is no surprise then that the preference for *brownings* is reflected in the photos of the carnival on social media. In addition, the frequency reinforces Edmondson's claim that the carnival does not represent the dominant Black Jamaica.

Similar to Edmondson, Barnes (2010) linked the ethnic/class divisions in carnival to the Miss Jamaica beauty pageants. She looked at the pageants of the 1940s and 1950s where the winner was selected from a pool of other White women. In a post slavery society, it was clear that Eurocentric features were deemed the standard of beauty and femininity in these contests. Barnes asserted that in the 1950s, through the Miss Jamaica pageant, beauty came to have, "A certain face, with certain features, hair texture, eye color, and shape of nose and lips" (p. 57). Although the pageants are no longer a competition among White women and have included participants of different heritage, there is an obvious preference for brown women or those whose features are closely linked to White Eurocentric ideals. These women eventually matriculate to international competitions while promoting a multi-racial Jamaica and reinforcing the *Out of Many, One People* national motto. Edmondson posited that this "myth of multiculturalism" is also

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8 In the song, Buju said that although he appreciated his material possessions, his most prized asset was his light skinned girlfriend.

present in the Jamaica carnival (1999, p. 71). Like the motto, the festival portrays to the outside world, a more plural society where the divisions between ethnicity and class are minimal. Yet, it cannot be ignored that the carnival operates as a site to sustain hegemonic notions and reinforce social inequalities.

In this regard, the content analysis showed that the majority of the photos from the three Facebook pages featured mostly women who were brown or light skinned with a significant absence of dark skinned women:

■ **TABLE 1 MOST COMMON SKIN SHADE**

Variable	Lehwego	Craig Harley Photography	Sleek
Light shade	58.2%	62.1%	57.6%
Medium shade	29.4%	26.2%	37.0%
Dark shade	1.7%	1.5%	1.2 %

The regularity of the *browning* was also noticed by participants. An interviewee stated that most of the photos of the carnival she had observed on Facebook featured mostly, “Mixed women with wavy hair or caramel skin, but not black, not white, but right in between”. Another commented, “They’re also usually light skinned, maybe of East Indian descent with long hair”. The descriptions of the complexions and hair texture describe “non-black” and include White or mixed Asian features, similar to those identified by Barnes among the Miss Jamaica pageant participants. These dominant features are captured in Figure 1:



Figure 1. "Brownings" in the Carnival (Harley, 2015)

Therefore, the findings from the content analysis were also observed by the masqueraders who further stated that they saw more diversity among the women in the actual parade than on social media. This observation questions the reality of what is seen on Facebook versus what is seen during the actual parade.

One of the photographers agreed that there is generally a preference for brown or light skinned female bodies in his Facebook photo album but does not see it as "something photographers do on purpose". Although his own album did not feature much dark skinned women, he contended that his images included a variety of skin shades among women. Even if it is not done "on purpose", selecting mostly light skinned women as subjects is a subconscious action influenced by hegemonic notions about beauty and attractiveness. This action is similar to selecting mostly brown contestants for the Miss Jamaica pageant. In the same way as the pageant organizers, the photographer buys into the myth of multiculturalism or the *Out of Many, One People* claim, and upholds the standards of beauty for women that does not represent the majority of Jamaican women.

In response to the claim that his Facebook album featured mostly women of a lighter skin shade, another photographer admitted that his page aimed to target a middle-class group of viewers, which ultimately dictated the images he posted:

We cater for a certain clientele and whoever falls in that clientele, that's who we capture and that's the people we interact with. It's not necessarily a color thing, but it's more along the lines of a premiumness that we're trying to capture

The *premiumness* that he spoke about refers to the privileged values and behaviors of the Jamaican middle-class and cannot be easily separated from color. There are cultural meanings attached to physical characteristics, and in this case, a light skin color, even in a dominantly Black society, is associated with being from the middle-class, attractive, desirable, educated, and well behaved. Nonetheless, masqueraders who are not light skinned also subscribe to these values because they know that the carnival site demands that they do. There is no doubt then that these constructions are rooted in Jamaica's past as a plantation society which prescribes the representations of desirability and attractiveness in the photos.



## Carnival Bodies

If the carnival body is a subject for gaze, then its presentation becomes important especially because most media feature one body type and not a variety. The carnival has created its own *premium* conventions through photographs of women's bodies that help to shape ideas about the ideal carnival physique. Concepts about body size and shape can be grounded in John Berger's (1972) claims that women can be both the subject and object of the gaze. In the process of being surveyed by men, women survey themselves to ensure that they are subscribing to standards set on their physical appearance. Likewise, women in the carnival construct a self-image based on their surveillance on social media where certain physical features are valued in Facebook photo albums. These standards stem from Western constructs that appreciate a slimmer body. However, while a flat stomach and a slender appearance are appreciated in the Eurocentric Western context, large buttocks, large thighs, and wider hips are features that are prized among Black populations.

In the popular cultural space of dancehall, bigger women are accepted alongside their slim counterparts. Andrea Shaw placed this preference within the context of Bakhtin's theory of the *carnivalesque* where dominant ideas are turned upside down during the carnival to benefit marginalized groups. In the same way, dancehall bodies embody an opposition to the Western or Eurocentric liking for slender frames by appreciating bigger ones:

The fat black woman neatly fits into this inverted order because she is not beautiful according to contemporary Eurocentric aesthetics just as the carnival/dancehall participants are not wealthy. This is why the large female body is such a dominant image in these performative spaces; it encapsulates the inverted essence of the space. (Shaw, 2006, p. 4)

Significantly, Shaw noted that the appreciation for a slimmer body tends to be a part of the middle-class value system, and as a result, it has become the ideal body size for the women who participate in the carnival parade. But the bias for slim and fit bodies is not only applicable to the Jamaica carnival. Any glance at photos of carnivals in Trinidad, Barbados, or in the Caribbean diaspora would also reveal a preference for slim bodies by the photographers.

The content analysis, therefore, revealed a majority of slim women in the photos on Facebook. But the popularity of small built women in photos was also linked to the style of the costumes. Table 2 shows that the most frequently photographed costumes were the bikini, the cage-bra monokini, and the monokini.



■ **TABLE 2. MOST COMMON COSTUMES**

Variable	Frequency: Lehwego	Craig Harley Photography	Sleek
Bikini	31.2%	56.8%	9.8%
Cage-bra monokini	27.1%	4.4%	55.4%
Monokini	25.4%	21.4%	23.9%

For instance, the design of the bikini, cage-bra monokini, and monokini revealed more breasts and stomach, which meant it was designed for a slimmer and fitter body. These designs are illustrated in Figure 2:



Figure 2. Bikini, Cage-bra Monokini, Monokini (Lehwego, 2015)

As expected, one of the photographers admitted that he preferred this body size:

I don't see it as any different from Victoria's Secret. It's always about someone who young ladies or females will aspire to look like- that perfect body or that perfect shape, or curve. At the same time, that body actually accentuates the costume more than the average.

The reference to the American lingerie brand, *Victoria's Secret* demonstrates the influence of Western ideas and the media's promotion of a standard body type in defining the ideal body shape and size among the middle and upper classes. The analysis also showed that slimmer bodies are preferred when combined with skin color. In opposition to the larger Black bodies in the dancehall, the brown smaller bodies in the carnival are seen as attractive, wealthy, non-threatening, and easy to control. The Miss Jamaica pageant attract similar sentiments as it relates to body type, which can be traced to the preference for Mulatto women on the plantation. These women, according to Mohammed, represented, "A class of people, the post-colonial inheritors of privilege and status passed on from the white upper class" (2000, p. 35). Their prevalence in the photos is expected because it reinforces dominant ideas about beauty in Jamaica, and the slim brown body then, comes to depict the ideal woman not just for the pageants, but also for the carnival parade.

The more exposure the costume allows, the smaller the masquerader is expected to be, which is also seen in Figure 2. As a result, the emphasis on exercise, diet, and losing weight is common among women in their preparation for the parade. All three masqueraders in the interviews spoke about engaging in a fitness and diet routine to attain a specific size and shape to fit the costumes. One masquerader admitted:

What I want personally is a flat tummy and bigger butt. I don't necessarily want to lose weight.

To achieve this goal, she eliminated sugar and junk food from her diet during the months leading up to the carnival. Additionally, she engaged in a rigorous exercise regimen. Despite these actions, she was not completely satisfied with the results on the day of the parade and felt that her stomach could have been flatter.

Another masquerader articulated similar sentiments about her body goals for the parade:

I wanted my stomach to be a little bit smaller and my bottom to be a little bit rounder to look better in my costume.

From November of the previous year, this masquerader got rid of rice, bread, and most meats from her diet. In addition, she began going to the gym, where she focused on exercises to reduce belly fat and shape her bottom. The need to achieve a flat stomach by both women "to look better" in their costumes showed the influence of Eurocentric Western standards on body size and shape where there is

a disapproval for larger mid-sections and bottoms, but not completely as the desired larger and rounder bottom has always been revered in the Caribbean context.

These body standards identified by the interviewees are set at the *band launch* in January where the women chosen to model the costumes are slim by Western standards.<sup>9</sup> The photos from the launch are then used to promote and market the carnival costumes on various platforms to target masqueraders with similar bodies. These images combined with those of the previous parades emphasize that there is a body standard for the carnival and the photographers uphold these when they select their subjects. The preference for this body type was echoed by a photographer:

I like a fit girl. As in not your everyday slim girl, a girl you can look on her and say she did work in the gym to come on the road and show what she did.

Consequently, during the process of surveying and being surveyed, women whose bodies do not meet these standards may feel forced to conform and so, they take various measures to achieve this ideal physique. Yet, weight loss measures such as gym memberships and healthy foods are expensive and are not easily accessible to all Jamaicans, and such, the preparation of the carnival body is limited to those of a particular socio-economic group.

The preference outlined in the photographer's statements does not mean that plus size masqueraders are not a part of the parade. Although all of the photographers stated that they took photos of women of all sizes, the images revealed a significant absence of larger sized women. While some plus size masqueraders may wear bikinis costumes, others pay more to get a costume with additional coverage or opt for a t-shirt as seen in Figure 3.

Even so, the skimpy costumes target smaller built women, and although they are worn by women of all sizes, there is an inclination to capture those whose bodies resemble a Victoria's Secret's model or those whose bodies are close to Eurocentric Western standards.

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9 A band launch is a show that is held about six months before the carnival parade to introduce the costumes to the public.



Figure 3. A costume with more coverage (Lehwego, 2015)

Being slim and fit carries meanings associated with desirability and attractiveness along with socio-economic status. In this sense, body size and shape in carnival also become a part of the divisions linked to middle and lower classes. Despite the rounder bottom and wider hips being appreciated, there is a negative discourse attached to larger, overweight or obese bodies within the middle-class that positions being *fat* as lazy, poor, greedy, unhealthy, unattractive, and lacking self-control. So, the slim and fit figure, whether brown or Black, is valued more in the carnival because it is a signifier of a higher socio-economic status.

### The “Video Light”<sup>10</sup>

Because the participants in the carnival in Jamaica are believed to be from the middle and upper classes, they are not represented on social media as *vulgar* or promoting *slackness* as they would if they were in the dancehall. The construction of vulgar is captured in the directive set by the Broadcasting Commission of Ja-

<sup>10</sup> *Video light* is a term used in dancehall parlance to refer to the period when the light from a camera remains on a patron who has attracted the camera operator’s attention because of her sensual dance movements.





maica in 2009 that showed a moral disapproval for any sexually suggestive dancing that they termed *daggering* and which seemed to be directed to the dancehall participants. Using the definition set by the Commission, the prevalent dance movements for soca and the carnival include wining that involves a sexually suggestive movement of the hips and waist, can also be classified as daggering. With this in mind, wining was not deemed appropriate for broadcast on the local television. But the photos captured on Facebook do submit to the Broadcasting Commission’s outlining of *respectability* and featured the majority of women in a standing pose with very few with them dancing with men or with other women as indicated in Table 3:

■ **TABLE 3. Female Masqueraders’ Position in the Photograph**

Position in the Photo	Lehwego	Craig Harley Photography	Sleek
Standing pose	68.4%	81.6%	80.4%
Dancing alone	16.9%	14.1%	10.9%
Dancing with another woman/ women	5.6%	1.0%	3.3%
Dancing with another man/men	8.5%	3.4%	5.4%

The prevalence of images with women in a standing pose reflects another middle/lower class or uptown/downtown division but in regards to suitable behavior for women in performance spaces. According to Carolyn Cooper, the carnival is where, “downtown *slackness* becomes permissive uptown *licence*” (1993, p. 189). Slackness here referred to an expression of female sexuality that challenges traditional Christian fundamentalist norms and is a cultural opposition to dominant ideas on women’s sexual behaviors. Cooper asserted that the provocative behavior of middle-class women in the carnival is a performance of their privileged status, which is not afforded to women in the dancehall. Yet, she does not acknowledge that the female masqueraders are in a sense subverting notions about femininity and respectability expected from brown middle-class women especially as it relates to wining.

Boyce-Davies (1998) contended that wining is aligned with personal freedom and facilitates agency among women. She put this claim within the context of the body “taking space” or moving into spaces where it is not allowed while defying race or gender restrictions. Despite their privileged status, the brown women who wine in the carnival are performing slackness by subverting conservative ideas about skimpily clad bodies, from a particular ethnic group/class, engaging



in sexually suggestive dancing in a public space. Even so, the slackness in the carnival is not captured by the photographers because of gender, race/ethnicity, and class biases.

When a woman in the dancehall becomes the focus of the *video light* or camera, her dancing gets more sexually suggestive, and the more provocative her movements, the more attention she would get from the camera operator. Similar to the participants in the dancehall, women compete for the attention of the photographers or the video light in the carnival as outlined in the following claim by a female masquerader:

I will always ensure that every camera person I see with a professional camera, I am going to make it my duty to go in front of that camera.

But unlike the women in dancehall's video light, the women in carnival do not typically become more provocative in front of the camera, but engage in the opposite- a pose. This standing pose is appropriate for social media platforms like Facebook where the subjects come under greater scrutiny by audiences. The need to avoid an attack on their respectability from the Facebook audience is captured in a statement from a female masquerader:

It's important to avoid unfortunate situations where someone's picture is on Facebook and they don't look or are behaving their best. They (the photographers) leave those out so the women don't get hurt by the comments from the viewers, and as we know, those comments could be brutal.

Similar to the dancehall, as Sonjah Stanley-Niaah asserted, the video light shows the subject's need for recognition or celebrity that can be consumed by viewers far removed from them (2010, p. 169). This claim does not mean, however, that female masqueraders are not engaged in their own performance of slackness through the sexually explicit wining that complements soca music; it is not really captured by the photographers because it does not fit within dominant ideas about middle-class respectability.

One of the photographers said that it was difficult to catch women in a candid moment of provocative dancing because when the female masqueraders were aware of the camera, they would immediately stop and pose. An example of this pose is captured in Figure 4:

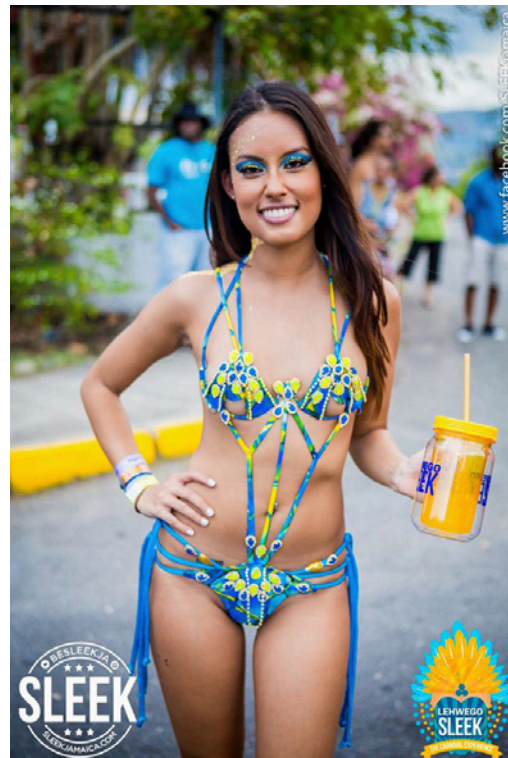


Figure 4. The Standing Pose (Sleek, 2015)

This observation was corroborated by all three photographers and by one of the masqueraders in the interviews who acknowledged posing when confronted by a photographer. She noted that if she was doing something “terrible” or “vulgar”, she would tone it down for the camera:

I don't necessarily change my behavior. I'm not going to stop what I'm doing unless I was doing something very terrible.

Because many of the women represent a particular ethnic group and class, the standing pose is seen as respectable and in opposition to the slackness of the video light of the dancehall. Although the women do display provocative dance movements in the parade and are challenging ideas about respectability when doing so, it is not represented in the images. The women in the carnival, therefore, change their performance for the camera, and like their counterparts in the dancehall, they are submitting to certain rules constructed for their carnival video light. Edmondson highlighted these norms when she said that the middle-class, “does not see its women wining in the streets at carnival as incompatible with the professional discourse of the office and the upwardly mobile home” (2009, p. 18). So, capturing these moments in the photos was not a priority for the photographers as they

sought to protect women from the backlash of not adhering to the rules of middle-class respectability. Another dichotomy noted with the prevalence of these photos is the positioning of the respectability of carnival in opposition to the slackness of dancehall, and the signifiers for each are linked to ethnic and class distinctions, disputing the claim of equality in the national motto.

### Out of Many- One People?

On April 3, 1962, Jamaica's Independence Celebration Committee proclaimed that *Out of Many, One People* would replace the Latin motto *Indus Uterque Serviet Uni* (both Indies shall serve one) for the newly independent nation in August, 1962. The new motto was etched on the Coat of Arms that featured a male and female member of the Taino tribe to capture the country's diverse racial heritage. In the newly independent period, the declaration was also a way to assure outsiders that they did not need to fear the dominant Black population. In addition, the motto aimed to convince the Black population that there were not major ethnic and class divisions in the society but a goal of equality for all. This myth is similarly embraced in the carnival that has a commercial characteristic, but is simultaneously a site to play out social and political tensions. These tensions have been embodied in dichotomies such as brown/black, uptown/downtown, fat/slim, and respectable/slack. By promoting these binaries in their images, the photographers are in fact, upholding a hegemonic discourse about middle-class values.

Despite not being under the surveillance of the Broadcasting Commission for the broadcast of daggery or any provocative behavior at events, the coverage of the Jamaica carnival on social media reflects the values and attitudes associated with a brown middle-class that are shared by the participants, the photographers, and possibly the audiences.<sup>11</sup> The frequency of a certain skin shade, body size, and pose in the images shows that the photographers sustain these ideals when they select who or who not to photograph and which photos are featured on their Facebook pages. Nonetheless, the conflicts attached to gender, ethnicity, class, and the body inherited from a colonial rule are also circulated by current power structures, including the media, and reinforced in other performance sites such as beauty pageants and the dancehall. These tensions ultimately question the myth of equality in the national motto, *Out of Many, One People*.

<sup>11</sup> This aspect about the audience has not been developed for the paper, but would be addressed in future research that would involve questionnaires and focus group interviews.



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