8 Laws of Attraction: Bodily Practices

> "Women negotiate a sense of self through beauty work and in relation to beauty standards, but they do so as socially located women positioning themselves in relation to socially located beauty standards" (Craig 2006: 166).

How does the practice of getting dressed or the style of one's hair matter when we speak about socio-cultural belonging, identity constructions and Jamaican female immigrant perspectives in a city like Montreal? When I first entered Debby's salon as one of the numerous social spaces of Jamaican women in the city, it did not seem different from a regular salon in Jamaica. Women get together and share stories about their daily lives while "prettying up" for an event or just having their hair done regularly. I may call this 'operational blindness' to the Jamaican context or merely the course of my fieldwork that at first led me to look into spaces and related aspects. The practice of attending to one's body, however, mattered much more than I had initially suspected. To re-fashion oneself and to style one's hair, nails, and other body parts, mirrors adaptations to, and demands from, the society on the one hand, and representations of self or expressions of self-empowerment, on the other hand. As Joanne Entwistle states, "dress in everyday life is always more than a shell, it is an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self" (2000: 10), and she further notes that there is a "the complex dynamic relationship between the body, dress and culture" (ibid. 11).

As introduced in the previous chapter, the main reason why the females in this study –although being different in age, immigrant generation, occupation or education level– only meet at specific social spaces (besides meeting at home) and dislike to engage in other activities in the city results from their experience of daily racism. Everyday systemic racialization of women that not only correlates with skin colour, but also with economic disadvantages, e.g., in the work field. Gendered racism entails appearance, bodily features, and sexism. To uncover Jamaican perceptions about femininity, one has to look into a set of cultural attributes (Moi 1992) that highlight sexuality norms for women in general and in particular 'femininity' as being a racialized subject within 'western' cultures. Femininity is a process in which women become gendered and become specific types of women transform-

ing their bodies into socio-culturally effective feminine roles. Experiences with everyday racism in Montreal, e.g., in the work field or in the streets, take part in this process in terms of rethinking oneself and one's outward appearance. Identity reconstructions then can become part of these internal processes (see Hall 1990), which are expressed in conversations as well as through actual bodily practices of altering, adapting, combining, rejecting or creating something new. Gilroy depicts relations between race and gender as follows:

> "[…] gender is the modality in which race is lived. An amplified and exaggerated masculinity has become the boastful centrepiece of a culture of compensation that self-consciously salves the misery of the disempowered and subordinated. This masculinity and its relational feminine counterpart become special symbols of the difference that race makes. They are lived and naturalized in the distinct patterns of family life on which the reproduction of racial identities supposedly relies. These gender identities come to exemplify the immutable cultural differences that apparently arise from absolute ethnic difference" (1993: 85).

Parameters such as race and gender intersect (Crenshaw 1994); especially when it comes to looking at perceived differences between masculinity and femininity and how both socially constructed categories interact within particular societies and cultural contexts. The assumption that there is one clear-cut Jamaican female identity concerning beauty ideals, the body and femininity neglects the existing variety of identities and bodily practices. Each person negotiates her blackness and constructs her identity within a specific 'intercultural' setting in Montreal surrounded by distinct societal norms and rules.

8.1 Complexities of Complexion

While waiting for Elisha at the end of her work shift, my eyes travel across the full display of the shop counter. On top, mountains of plastic packages with hair of all sorts and textures: curly, smooth, wavy, short, long, medium, red, blue, blonde, brown, and black (to name a few). Inside the glass case next to the many bottles of nail polish, I notice a label on a face cream that promises a "bright and glowing" complexion. Before Elisha became what she calls "conscious and self-empowered", she regularly used such bleaching products to lighten her skin. After work, she produces some old photographs of herself from the bottom of one of the counter compartments. The photograph shows a 20-something girl in skin-tight clothing, with a long, blonde bob and blue eye shadow, her skin numerous shades lighter than it is now. When I questioned her about when she started to bleach her skin, she revealed that she never made a conscious decision to do so. Growing up, many females around her practiced it, some of her friends in school, her mom, and her

aunt, and so she did it too. For eight years, she used lotions on her face and body to become a "browning", as Jamaicans call a lighter-skinned Black person. "I could navigate myself much easier in school or outside activities. It was less a struggle than it is now, but I was someone else", recalls Elisha. Having a lighter complexion made her feel more beautiful for some time, however, the chemicals found in bleaching creams left her with rashes, discoloration and extremely dry skin. "Bleaching […], it damaged my body and soul. Now that I know better, I want to encourage other women to wear their natural self and be themselves. That's what my art is for, too!" As Elisha speaks about her time as a bleacher, her sister Debby cuts into our conversation and clarifies, "the cream makes your skin look clear and smooth, these products are not so harsh anymore nowadays, […] you don't even have to use that much, just a little tip, you know". Here, beauty performances are not only about a preference for whiteness, but also about female bodies in general and in particular about preferences for blackness.

Overall, women in Jamaica have a historically difficult stand concerning gender norms that restricted their behavioural and corporeal characteristics in relation to a predominantly male, hegemonic society. Similar, to the image of the 1950s and 1960s 'housewife' in Germany, females in Jamaica, often in connection with Christian values, have to be virtuous women. This virtuosity strongly connects with motherhood even though recent feminist movements have tried to counteract Jamaica's prevailing cis-gender, and also heteronormative society, the socialization of children is still oriented along clear-cut gender, colour, and class lines. While Elisha decided to stop bleaching and started wearing her real hair as locks, her sister Debby has a different perspective of what is beautiful. After all, Debby maintains her life by making other women 'more' beautiful. The debate happening between the sisters on this issue plays out among many Jamaican women who are grappling with what beauty means and what sacrifices are worth making for it. This debate is also tied to race issues in Montreal. Debby says, "It's not just here, you know it's all over America and Jamaica, too. We're women, and we're Black, we're not brown, so it's upon us how people see us", she explains. "Beautifying the skin" as Debby calls it and different stylization possibilities for hair and nails enable her to produce whatever style is needed for any occasion. "Like when you go to work, you want to look appropriate, you want to fit in, you know, […] when you go to a dance, you want to stand out, you want to look good and sexy […] sometimes you just want something new, it depends, you have to feel it […]", Debby explains. Debby's statement highlights another important aspect, which shows that difference should not only be thought of as a binary opposition between opposing cultures or ideals (Canada vs. Jamaica), but also as difference that exists within the Jamaican socio-cultural context itself (natural vs. unnatural). A desire for a lighter complexion is not a new phenomenon in Jamaica. It is deeply rooted in the history of slavery and colonialism that dictated and indoctrinated imperialistic thoughts and assimilation to Eu-

rocentric ideals and values. In his Jamaican-based research, Hutton deconstructs the prevailing Eurocentric and post-colonial 'white' aesthetic constructions of the Black body.

> "Masking is a far more sophisticated technological and scientific beauty business today compared to the balmy days of slavery when women of African descent working in the great house first started using the solution they used to clean the slaveholders' floor to bleach their faces" (Hutton 2016: 30).

The social stratification in present-day Jamaica is still oriented along different skin shades from light to dark, from top to bottom. Lighter skin remains a marker of privilege and access. A small number of light-skinned or white families own a major share of national wealth in Jamaica with a significant part held by Chinese and Middle Eastern individuals while the majority of the Afro-Jamaican population manage small and medium-sized enterprises and few are part of the upper social class. The majority of impoverished people in the inner-city communities are of African descent. Therefore, colourism plays an essential role in defining social affiliation. A common Jamaican saying for this phenomenon states, "If you are Black you stand back, if you are brown you stick around, if you are white you are right". Therefore, as Austin-Broos analyses, social class is mediated "through the idiom of colour shade and can reflect biologized notions of race" (Austin-Broos 1994: 218). Hence, many Jamaican women (and men) chemically change the colour of their skin, at the risk of skin cancer or severe organ damage through chemical ingredients. While the practice is a subject in Jamaican newspapers or on radio shows, bleaching is hardly criticized as a validation-seeking practice by a societal system, which historically rejected blackness in favour of assimilating or adapting to colonial and post-colonial values that marginalize Black people. In present-day Jamaica, this ongoing problem has quite recently attracted the attention of international media such as *Marie Claire Magazine* or the *Washington Post*. Jamaican Jody Cooper, the subject of a *Marie Claire* article, responded to the question of why she bleached as follows: "When you black in Jamaica, nobody sees you" (Kebede 2017: n.p.). Here, she is referring to a perceived absence of worth and devaluation of Black skin in her experience of daily colourism and classism.

Under the British colonial regime, the ill-treatment and negation of self were standard practices in the abuse strategies and enslavement of Black people and bodies. Attire and clothing were markers of social status and differentiation between e.g., master and slave (Buckridge 2004). Historically, 'brown' Jamaicans were the product of relationships between Black Jamaicans and white colonialists, and often received greater access to land and resources. As a beauty concept, skin bleaching and its less chemically infused siblings, e.g., the 'lightening' products in Debby's store of brands such as *Nivea*, *Garnier* or *Bio Claire* are commonly used amongst many Jamaican women to achieve their desired looks. Products for skin

bleaching are over the counter cosmetics. They hide behind positive connoted synonyms, such as "glow", "clear" or "brighten". The belief that brown-skinned women are more beautiful and more attractive to men and have it easier in life are commonplace in Jamaica and across the Caribbean and African diaspora (Brown-Glaude 2013: 57). This ongoing colourism transcends into chances of upward social mobility and gives insights into a preference of lifestyles and clothing that reflect closeness to European or North American culture. While 'Africa' and 'African symbols' have gained international acceptance and likeability, specifically through the positive connotation and distribution of the Rastafari philosophy in Jamaican popular music such as Reggae, it is still a rather slowly growing shift in the mental landscape of the local society. With that in mind, it is hardly surprising that different ideals and models of beauty emerge in the Jamaican diaspora as responses or counter-activities to white beauty ideals. As migrants are forced to cope with the culture they live in without being merely assimilated, they are in a continual process of identity development (Hall 1999: 435). Daily stylization practices and the production of Black beauty ideals are recreated in certain power and hierarchical structures under the given circumstances and societal contexts. Famous Kenyan actor Lupita Nyongo'o, who became a media phenomenon as a 'natural' Black beauty icon after her Oscar-winning star debut in the movie "12 Years a Slave", reflects on her own experiences in a 2014 article in *Glamour* magazine. Here she states,

> "European standards of beauty are something that plague the entire world – the idea that darker skin is not beautiful, that light skin is the key to success and love. […]. When I was in second grade, one of my teachers said, 'Where are you going to find a husband? How are you going to find someone darker than you do?' […]. I remember seeing a commercial where a woman goes for an interview and does not get the job. Then she puts cream on her face to lighten her skin and she gets the job! This is the message: that dark skin is unacceptable" (Bennetts 2014: n.p.).

Since post-colonial differentiations among colour lines prevail in Caribbean and African societies such as Jamaica and Kenya, and since beauty industries and media houses worldwide keep on publishing Eurocentric and iconic ideals of white beauty, it is hardly surprising that Montreal offers no exception. Here, a statement from one of the salon's regular clients emphasizes these circumstances and the invisibility of Black women in Montreal. "We, Black women, are not part of society, understood? Living in Montreal, I cannot even get my shade [referring to her makeup foundation]. I rely on Debby because she buys the shades we need when she goes to New York. […] Our skin colour doesn't exist in Quebec […]", explains the woman one day over a prolonged discussion about beauty, skin colour, and access to society in Montreal. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the dialogical relationship within the community and the identifications of values that exist in the

various crossings of Black and white beauty ideals. As Hall states, "cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning" (Hall 1990: 226). While Afrocentric discourses about skin bleaching often identify a "self-hate narrative", Charles (2010) argues in his Jamaican-based psychological study, that the decision to fade one's skin tone is not a rejection of blackness in general, nor is it a result of low self-worth. While some women who bleach their skin may lack confidence, his research has shown that bleachers and non-bleachers alike have the same level of self-esteem (ibid.). With lighter-skinned women viewed as more attractive and beautiful, the self-hate narrative is not the dominant one.

My preliminary expectations of what to encounter in Debby's beauty salon were different from the actual situation. Even though Debby offers 'over the counter' skin bleaching products and chemical hair straightening techniques as well as weaves and wigs, she also offers –in contrast to regular beauty salons in Jamaica– natural hairstyling such as cornrows, dreadlocks or afros. Even if Debby's salon (and her self-understanding) resembles more Eurocentric beauty ideals, the salon also opens up a space of discourse and a discussion of beauty as a racialized subject. In his concluding remarks, Hutton states,

> "[…] the ideational and practical ontological desecration of the black body continues in rhetoric, hairdo, skin do and other dos and is often articulated as expressions of freedom and universalism […]. […] the meanings and messages used to advertise certain "hair care/skin care" products aimed at obscuring/masking/altering Africa in the black body […] are rooted, as ever, in the same racist aesthetic complex of slavery and colonialism" (2016: 30-31).

Elisha's current experiences in Montreal hail mainly from her involvement and friendships in the art and music scene. Here, younger and Canadian-born Afro-Caribbean people negotiate their place, meaning and belonging in the city. While their socio-economic place-making strategies were already discussed, it is crucial to examine individual styles of dress and hair to understand inherent identity constructions. This younger generation claims to be more self-empowered and self-confident, which is exemplified in, for example, communal efforts in "Black Lives Matter" demonstrations that were recurrently taking place during my time in Montreal. Besides, their mind-set as being "Canadian-born" makes them significantly stronger when it comes to fighting for their rights and for a Black diversity experience that should be, in their words "a major part of the mental landscape in Quebec". Even though the feeling of vulnerability, e.g., concerning police control, is strong and upsets Elisha a lot, their commitment to justice is part of their self-understanding. Amongst other things, they use their get-together for the sharing of critical thoughts and for the reading of Black liberation literature, for exam-

ple, Walter Rodney or Frantz Fanon. In addition, some of Elisha's friends claim to be Rastafari. While artistic and musical presentations together with Afrocentric representations and ethnic symbols are commonplace, Afrocentric clothing and politicized hairstyles such as dreadlocks or 'natural' hairstyles such as afros are the norm.

Here attire, hair, and clothing symbolize an idealized closeness and identification with Africa and blackness. This group of third generation children of Afro-Caribbean immigrants consciously construct individual lifestyles and adapt identities of an idealized homeland that are closer to their self-understanding as empowered Black youth that counteracts (also politically) the mainstream society in Montreal and its inherent restrictions. As Giddens states "A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (1991: 83). The adaptation, production, and wearing of Afrocentric clothing and symbols, head-wraps, natural cosmetics made from African shea butter and jewellery made from wood, gold or shells represent one form of challenging the everyday beauty aesthetics and status quo of a Eurocentric, white society as they are not worn without facing counter-reactions. Therefore, identity politics here strongly align along the differentiation of 'real' and 'fake', whereby fake hair, nails or lashes, and too much make-up are undesirable and 'natural' hairstyles and symbols as well as specific clothing, elevate feminine beauty positively. As Bakare-Yusuf notes on the choice to grow dreadlocks by Rastafari people in Jamaica,

> "These motifs not only posed a challenge to the white capitalist and Christian ideology pervasive on the island, but they also drew attention to the permanent state of warfare (…). Rastafarian fashion, in particular the wearing of dreadlocks, performed a critique of the dominant regime, asserting an alternative cultural, ethical and aesthetic sensibility in its stead" (2006: 3).

For this chapter, it was crucial to apply an approach that is critical of the idea of white beauty as being iconic. Reproducing a white-Black binary means misconceiving the broader picture of the mixing and crossing of Black beauty styles, techniques, and traditions. There is nothing like the creation or mimicry of the "white women" in Debby's beauty shop. What is re-created here are beauty practices based on a Black Jamaican diasporic experience and therefore, varying beauty images exist depending on the occasion and the individual. In the case of Montreal, categories of race, class, gender and also age contest white beauty as much as Black beauty. Race, class and gender combine what constitutes "Jamaica's discourse of heritable identity" (Austin-Broos 1994: 218). No single style is assigned or limited to embody sameness or difference concerning a Black or white beauty ideal. Different stylization possibilities open up new opportunities for subjectivity

and autonomy concerning assumed "essentialized" identities in cultural or bodily practices.

8.2 Dancehall Fashion

While I was researching in Montreal, Dancehall parties were one of the first entry points of my fieldwork and relevant for gaining orientation knowledge in the city. At Dancehall parties, few limitations exist, especially when it comes to extravagant clothing, jewellery, sexiness and style. Dancehall offers women the opportunity to negotiate every-day boundaries of the hegemonic (and patriarchal) society and give them control over their bodies and fears. "When I go out to a party, I dress accordingly to how I feel […] you got to have that confidence and show it off when you go out if you don't do it nobody will do it for you", explains Debby while putting on her makeup. It is nearly 10 p.m. and throughout the next two and a half hours, everyone is getting ready for the party, drinking wine, smoking menthol cigarettes, listening to music and chatting about the upcoming night. Two of Debby's girls came over to "hold a vibes" before going out. For me, being able to participate in their "night-out", observing and taking part in their discussions (merely asking annoying questions) were useful components in analysing and understanding various imaginations about femininity (and masculinity).

Dancehall[1] being Jamaica's most popular musical genre encompasses numerous meanings regarding identity, culture, social class, masculinity, and femininity. A broad range of scholarly research exists (e.g. Cooper 1993, 1995, 2000, 2004; Hope 2006, 2010; Stanley-Niaah 2010; Stolzoff 2002; Lesser 2008), especially concerning cultural studies, i.e., linguistics, visuals, sounds or lyrical texts. In Jamaica, Dancehall is a historically and contemporary male-dominated industry, similar to Reggae. Dancehall is a 'battlefield' of hegemonic representations of male activities and pronouncements of dominant male voices and identity constructions. Lesser, for example, traced in her historical study on photography a total absence of women's agency in Jamaican records (LPs) and Dancehall images (Lesser 2008). Nowadays, women or better, female bodies, are highly visible, and usually the centres of (sexual) male attraction. As a genre, Dancehall is known to be homophobic and leaves no room for representations other than heteronormative sexual orientations. The Jamaican genre's digital rhythms inspire female bodies to "wine" or to "bubble", as

1 Note: During the late 1970s, Dancehall began to evolve as a musical genre in Jamaica. Initially, to describe the more upbeat sound of Reggae, Dancehall invented its own particular codes and styles with the arrival of digital keyboards and drum machines. Back then, Dancehall entirely evolved around sound systems and male, mobile DJ crews, who ran marathon sessions and street dances.

the dynamic rotation of the waist is called in Jamaica and the lyrics of "gyal tunes"[2] echo this connection. Since the 1980s, music videos with acrobatic dancers, so-called Dancehall queens, in extravagant clothing, coloured wigs, high-heeled boots, fishnet tops, latex clothes, massive jewellery, and "batty riders"[3] are widely known. These women do not only run Kingston's street parties, but also the halls of diaspora nightclubs with their splits, headstands and other 'flexible' performances. While Dancehall minimized female voices for a long time, numerous female artists challenged the male gaze in the early 1990s and counteracted the chauvinist sexual politics of the genre by proving they could be as provocative and 'slack'[4] as their male counterparts could. Until today, female artists have been challenging a globally influential and often frustratingly misogynist music genre to reckon with long-held taboos and prejudices as well as to expand its traditionally limited view on femininity. Scholarly research (Stanley-Niaah 2004; Bakare-Yusuf 2006) on the role of Dancehall and aspects of gender, class, and identity, highlight that fashion and adornment as well as bodily practices played a marginalized role until after the millennium in comparison to the content of songs, sounds, and visuals.

While at the beginning of my study, aspects such as social spaces were more striking, the analysis of the empirical material highlighted the importance of women's bodily practices related to Dancehall events. The fashioning and styling of bodies give insight into female 'embodied and situated' phenomena (DeMello 2014), which reflect socio-cultural and historical changes. Additionally, fashion allows Dancehall-followers like Debby to challenge their social realities. The body here works as a "canvas of representation" (Hall 1993), so the outside world can see them as they are or as they want to be seen. Here, representations not only counteract structural and daily racism in Montreal, but also the constraints of patriarchy and an ideal Christian logic of femininity that still prevails in the context of contemporary Jamaican life. Cooper analyses the existence of a specific female role model in Jamaican society in which the image of motherhood is made central to a woman's worth and value; the woman is the guardian of the race –a Puritan moral institution (Cooper 2000: 381f.). In the context of a longstanding ambivalent discourse on racism and sexism, and taking into account the structural, physical and psychological violence of slavery and oppression, the continued importance of this ideal and of the patriarchal nuclear family is noteworthy. Paul Gilroy argues fittingly that race was associated with the reign of Black masculinity, the "integrity of the race is thus made interchangeable with the integrity of black masculinity,

2 Note: Songs that describe how a woman should dance or move her body to attract male attention.

3 Note: A very short hot pant.

4 Note: Slackness refers to a Jamaican term used to describe 'vulgar' behaviour and sexist lyrics in live performances or recordings.

which must be regenerated at all costs" (Gilroy 1993: 194). However, women are not just victims of systemic oppression, but find productive ways to express socio-cultural representations and constructions through their agency and bodies. The practice of dressing up and getting ready for a Dancehall event, therefore, says as much about beauty ideals and Jamaican taste for a 'bling-bling' lifestyle as it does about everyday experiences in the city of Montreal. The fact that Debby and her friends do not understand their bodily practices as a rebellion to hegemonic structures is of little relevance here. Debby explicitly states that she is dressing up for herself and that Dancehall parties allow her to express herself freely. However, it is less about whether Debby and her female friends deliberately reflect or verbally express their actions, but rather about the visibility and recognition of their female agency through their attire, accessories and styling techniques. What I encountered with Debby and her friends cannot be seen as an intentional activism similar to her sister Elisha's conscious counter-activities in the Afrocentric arts network. Hence, Debby's expressive bodily actions seem to be less conscious or outspoken self-interpretations. Instead, the analysis and participatory observation opened up additional, possible interpretations of these women's bodily practices.

While Dancehall music and culture have now become mainstream, the energy, creativity, and reproduction continue to be drawn from the socio-cultural existences of the marginalized urban poor. According to Cooper, the female body became the site of the "ongoing struggle over high culture and low, respectability and riot, propriety and vulgarity" (Cooper 2000: 350). Cooper states further that Dancehall is the "social space in which the smell of female power is exuded in the extravagant display of flashy jewellery, expensive clothes, [and] elaborate hairstyles" (1993: 155). Therefore, every Dancehall event is an opportunity to display and perform the most extravagant, sexy and sometimes grotesque, clothing and style. While Debby is standing in front of the full-length mirror, her friend is squeezing her upper body into a skin-tight bodysuit, trying to close the zipper. The bodysuit is a dark-blue, transparent mesh embroidered with rhinestones, lace, and flower applications. Her waist is cinched into a tight zipper corset, turning her figure into an hourglass shape. The fake diamond chain around her neck sparkles together with the rhinestone earrings and bangles. Her eye shadow in dark-blue matches the colour of the bodysuit while her long, glued-on lashes make the look complete. "The clothes we wear are made to emphasize your body. You can go out and dance in really anything. Everyone wants to just feel the best about themselves and fashion can do that for you", Debby explains while running her long, pointed fingernails through her silky-straight, black wig of the night that reaches down to her buttocks. "If you have something that bothers you, once you touch inna di dance, the stress just lifts off your head", says Debby's friend who is wearing a tiger-print negligee type dress with black transparent stockings and a heavy golden chain. Her red, short-bob wig hangs over one of Debby's chairs. While she applies vanilla-scented glitter

lotion on her arms she states, "But your fashion has to be on top!". The other two agree with serious looks on their faces. Debby's outfit of the night and her friends' outfits show off their curves, every part of the wardrobe is made to highlight the most crucial female body parts such as breasts and buttocks. "You ready?" Debby asks me, while she helps her friend into a tight black corset leather outfit that does not cover more of her than a swimsuit.

Reflecting now on the evening and the entire "getting-ready-ceremony" with Debby and her friends, I realize how bold these women are to continue living this part of Jamaican culture in a city like Montreal and actually entering the streets in outfits like these. While it is nothing sensational to be dressed like this in the Jamaican Dancehall scene, in Canada as well as in other European and North American countries, this way of styling and dressing seems rather provocative or uncommon. Even though a dance club is a rather 'free zone' when it comes to "dressing up", one seldom sees women who get ready for the club in this specific way. Moreover, in the above-mentioned countries the personal space is different from in Jamaica. There is a significant distance or unspoken rule of approaching or even touching someone. In Jamaica, people who you interact with will touch you more often, e.g., put a hand on one's shoulder or stand closer to you in conversations without the intention of intervening into one's personal space. Distance and closeness simply function differently in different social spaces. In addition, the way of dancing is very different and connected with much closer body contact. However, physical contact and social closeness do not have to match. In addition, while common beauty ideals promote an attractive and sexy look for women, there is an invisible line of too attractive and too sexy that exists from a Eurocentric perspective, even for dance- and nightclubs. Notably, when it comes to bodily features and nudity, there is a borderline of what a woman can wear both when she is rather skinny or rather voluminous in body size. At Dancehall parties, this borderline softens and sexiness seems non-negotiable. It is a given circumstance, and the extravagant outfits become a source of confidence, not an obstacle. When Debby slips into her rhinestone covered stiletto high heels, she says, "you just have to look inna yuhself and know say you a come first, you got to have that feel, because if you don't have it, nobody will have it for you"[5]. For Debby, her outfit is a way to show off her personality and her confidence. In understanding the importance of dressing up for an event, Debby's personal background is again relevant. Since she has a reputation to lose when it comes to beauty and her business, she has to represent her "best self" when going out. Debby explains that she sees herself as the best ad-

5 Translation/ meaning: At a Dancehall event, you have to realize that it is mainly about your own power of representation, you have to be confident, because if you're not confident, people can make you feel inferior about yourself.

vertising platform for her business and an ambassador of the newest trends and styles.

At the party, the friends find their spot in a corner close to the small club stage where everybody can see them. "This is our place, even if we come late everybody knows", Debby explains as a waiter brings a big bucket filled with ice, cups, Campari, Baileys and soda to the bistro table. Upon my questioning look, Debby's friend quickly adds, "They know what we drink". The party starts about 30 minutes later, with Debby and her friends showing off their dancing skills and love for the music. Interestingly, when men approach the corner to ask them for a dance or to compliment them on their looks, their smiles fade and they put on what I would call a "cool attitude". "We no jus dance with any man, you know, we sample dem out […] dem haffi represent some style"[6], Debby screams into my ear while her friend inspects the next candidate. At the end of the party night, the friends only danced with certain men, obviously none of the other contenders was "good enough". Debby and her friends truly exercise power (cf. Cooper 1993) by choosing dance partners while at the same time visibly attracting a lot of male attention (through their styling and dancing skills). In that sense, their movements, sexy fashion and what they believe to be male desires remain nothing more than "eye candy" for most men. After the dance, they leave satisfied with numerous compliments for their appearance and moves, but without any men. Of course, "sex sells"; however, in a patriarchal society, dressing in a very sexy manner can also represent a playful way of asserting female power and breaking the rules. Moreover, these practices show Jamaican interpretations of female sexuality and appearance, images that counteract the hegemonic and patriarchal norms and values of a Eurocentric ideal. The music genres expressiveness concerning overt sexist behaviour and dominance over the female body can be visually and in its lyrical content quite overwhelming to outsiders. However, as any form of popular culture, Dancehall is a musical representation and an arena for socio-cultural negotiation (Cooper 2004; Hope 2006). Jamaican studies on Dancehall show that the representation of gender roles and female bodies can be interpreted quite contrary to the assumptions of 'oppression or dominance' of Eurocentric observers (Cooper 1995; Hope 2010). Provocative clothing and bodily modification highlight the "erotic play" and representation mechanisms in Dancehall. The female "vulgarity" at Dancehall events embodies traces of historical events, folklore rhymes and anticolonial resistance (Cooper 1995: x) and disrupts the everyday patriarchal gender norms by exercising 'performance power' (Cooper 1993) and by producing (at least in the encapsulated moment of the Dancehall) their very own 'non-ordinary' gender and fashion rules.

6 Translation: We're not just dancing with any man that comes along, we choose them […] they have to represent a certain attitude/ attractiveness.

This chapter showed how the female body becomes part of a socio-cultural construction of gender and identity, through internal as well as external influences, and highlights in what ways beauty, hair, weight as well as fashion symbolize categories of difference, representation, inclusion, exclusion, and Jamaican female self-understandings. Women who are engaged in Dancehall culture, therefore, reveal femininity as an embodied construction that tackles the Eurocentric and patriarchal separation between the mother and the whore, everyday life and staging, natural and unnatural, conform and non-conform. Ultimately, bodily practices here means taking control over their image and how they want to be seen by others. The eroticized disclosure of voluminous, Black female bodies in revealing apparel disrupts the male "-schisms" between the sexy and the maternal body (cf. Cooper 1993). What at first seems like sexual vulgarity or availability becomes agency through which women such as Debby claim their positionality opposed to external and internal, normative pressures. Beyond bodily aesthetics, a non-Eurocentric or non-white opposition to embodiment and corporeal expression is at work here. Instead of having self-controlling attitudes towards the body, Dancehall fashion highlights women's alternative interpretations to common socio-cultural standards. Through Dancehall, Jamaican women like Debby push their love for pomp and splendour to the limit and celebrate the admiration for a full-figured, sexy female body (cf. Bakare-Yusuf 2006). Therefore, Dancehall fashion also ruptures social class in a socio-cultural environment such as Montreal; an environment that usually excludes women of colour as "visible minorities" and gives them limited access to society.

8.3 Of Wigs and Weight

While standing in front of her mirror, Ms. Brown unwraps her headband to get ready for her weekly bingo night. "I'm trying out my new hair, I got it the other day at the salon, makes me look ten years younger [chuckles], you will see". While she continues to praise her new look, Ms. Brown gently unwraps a wig from a plastic foil, carefully placing it on the dresser in front of her. "I was born in a time when my mother pushed down the pressing comb in our hair ['our' is here referring to herself and her sister], we had no choice than to sit tight, we didn't know anything about perms or relaxers, but about pain I tell you it hurt, it hurt. Now, I just wear these three styles [pointing at several wigs on the dresser], my hair stopped being fluffy, you know, so I buy fluffy", she laughs. Looking at the different styles, I point to the only straight, short, black-haired wig that sits on top of a small stand to the side of the commode and ask why this one is unwrapped. "This one? Oh, don't mind this one, this one is for work, trust me, you wouldn't know me at work", Ms. Brown declares and turns again towards her new wig with a shrug of her shoulders that ends this matter. In her occupation as a geriatric nurse, Ms. Brown learned

how to dress for the 'standard image' or "appropriate look" as she refers to it. In her workplace, it was always essential for her not to stand out, which means that she has been wearing that same short, sleek, unobtrusive wig for the last 30-odd years, a wig that has passed as her hair with none of her white bosses or co-workers and primarily white patients ever calling it into question. Even though work is a sensitive topic, which Ms. Brown likes to avoid in our conversations, the "work-wig" says a lot about her relationship with work and the way she deals with work-related racialization. Experiences involved, for example, confrontations with racist patients who hindered her caretaking, who spat on her and vilified her. Other experiences with work hierarchies and structural racism made her learn to do her work silently, while never trying to be smarter or able to handle things better than her superiors or colleagues. The statement "you wouldn't know me at work" emphasizes this attempt to be inconspicuous at work and highlights a differentiation between her self-understanding and the role that she plays at her job. The wig becomes part of her uniform, which minimizes the debate about her bodily features and expresses her experience of mirroring a white 'standard image'. Through the wig, she mimics what a woman of her age and skin colour should appropriately look like at work from a Eurocentric, white point of view (cf. Bhabha 1994), an image that negates femininity for Ms. Brown. This styling practice, which she performs every weekday before leaving for work, includes her internal preparation and daily transformation of going to a workplace where she is somebody else. Work, in general, consumes a large amount of her daily life. Still, she allows other recreational activities such as going to church, going to the salon or going to bingo nights to have much greater importance in her life. The possibility of dressing up and wearing styles interchangeably as she gets ready anew for each occasion celebrates these crucial activities. Although she has a 'nice colleague' from Trinidad and a general love for her job despite recurrent adverse events, work is merely a means to an end. The prospect of her future pension and the financial support of her family has always been her main goal and focus.

Carol, who also grew up with the idea of 'good' and 'bad' hair, straightened her own and her daughter's hair throughout her life. Until today from time to time, her adult daughter goes to her house to let her do her hair. For Carol, this is normal and appropriate, and she has never really put this practice into question. In her sense, it was one way of avoiding any negative implications for her daughter in school and herself in her teaching occupation. Conform to her upbringing and 'properness', hairstyle and beauty are practical tools to fit into society, whether this society is Jamaican or Canadian. "To play by the rules, but not to duck" was always Carol's mantra. She explains, "Canada is now a diverse mixture of people, colours, cultures, and ethnicities from all over the globe. This diversity has created misconceptions in Canadians that often led to efforts to dominate and exploit people because of their differences in culture, colour, or ethnicity". On racial discrimination in Montreal

she furthers, "[…] racism persists, the perpetrators continue, and the victims have to deal with its negative effects, especially in educational, economic, and career opportunities. […] Overcoming certain challenges means to adapt by being confident, determined, strong, efficient, and proud", Carol contextualizes in one of our interviews. Throughout her years as a teacher, she dedicated lots of her work to workshops and seminars that dealt with the topic of racism and helped to build up students' confidence through advising how to deal with racist behaviour. Even though Carol persisted with her hair straightening routine and her understanding of 'proper appearance', it was never so much about the outside appearance of a person as it was much more about their inner attitude and self-confidence. "The situation is no matter how long you are here, and even if you are born Canadian like my children, you will always be different, a foreigner. It's just this thought in white peoples head that they have to ask you where you're 'originally' from. […]. I put much thought into how to teach my children and students how they can react to such an incidence, and we have not yet talked about real discrimination. […]", Carol puts forth. The processes of 'othering' (Spivak 1985), is in Carol's view a virtually never-ending situation for Black people in Canada, which resembles all my interlocutors' experiences in their daily life activities. Othering refers to "the process of attaching moral codes of inferiority to difference", which emerges as a critical discursive tool for understanding discrimination and exclusion used against individuals or groups based on their belonging to a marginalized population (Krumer-Nevo/Sidi 2012: 299-300). This status of marginalization is perceived differently by the interlocutors with a complex multitude of emotional as well as bodily coping mechanisms in handling exclusionary and racist tendencies. The negative experience of racism in daily life activities, together with discrimination in the work place, causes a high level of emotional frustration. This frustration transcends into socio-cultural, spatial and especially bodily practices that maintain positive imaginaries, remembrance, and narratives of being 'proud' Jamaicans.

In Ms. Brown's case, pride also plays an important role in bodily practices and discourses about traditional food consumption and culture. Discussing beauty with a woman like Ms. Brown is rather body-centred and less engaged with bleaching creams or a wide variety of hairstyling techniques. A good-looking woman cannot be "maga" (meagre) as Ms. Brown puts it. Throughout the fieldwork, she continuously argued with me about weight or my vegetarian diet. While Ms. Brown liked to make fun of me for not eating meat, eating food together was a way of discussing different ideals of beauty and especially Eurocentric images of an ideal, thin female body. Within Ms. Brown's home, similar to other Jamaican households, food is not something that should be controlled or limited when reflecting on female bodily attributes. Thinking about North American or European white perceptions, discourses, and images, e.g., in popular culture about the stereotyped ideal female body, automatically leads to a skinny, well-toned, longhaired, and sun-tanned

model. Even though many 'body positivity campaigns' and advertisements have been trying to change beauty stereotypes in recent years, the overarching image of thinness remains the ideal one, whereby thinness often and supposedly equals health. The restriction of food intake, dieting, or calorie counting was, however, not part of the performance of beauty and femininity in the case of the interlocutors. By paying attention to what takes place in the home, eating food is uncovered as highly ethnic. Here, health plays a significant role again.

In Jamaica, full-figured, 'thick' women are considered beautiful and healthy. Telling someone 'you gained weight' is a compliment, and when somebody loses a significant amount of weight people wonder what kind of stress caused this deficit to occur. Food here is very much about well-being and eating right and enough food is a strategy for not getting sick. While being "thick" and having a large bottom is a feature of attractiveness for Jamaican females, having a large figure also indicates fertility and successful reproduction (Sobo 1996). According to Igenoza, food availability and the sharing of food play a central role in Black cultures. She argues further: "Slimness is not something that is valued, and mothers are continually asking their daughters and the younger women around them if they are eating properly" (Igenoza 2017: 114). When going to Ms. Brown's house, eating food was a given and a part of our interaction and socializing practice. Without food, there would have probably been no conversations. When it comes to health matters, Ms. Brown's doctor recently confronted her with the idea of slimming down for health reasons. While she knows the general warnings about the dangers of obesity and sicknesses related to overeating, she is less concerned with changing her dietary habits. As Sobo argues, "Notions of food and health influence the symbolic communications made through our bodies, which influence the ways we shape and experience our bodily features" (Sobo 1996: 323). Even though Ms. Brown accepts the recommendations of her doctor that she should control her fat and sugar intake due to her heart and her inherited risk for diabetes, she still holds on to her understanding of healthy cooking. This understanding involves cooking with certain spices such as, e.g., thyme, garlic, pimento, and ginger that are beneficial to overall health and therefore lower, in her view, the risk of sickness. Her Jamaican food culture and her self-understanding are closely interconnected. Hence, medical recommendations will hardly be able to change her perception of health and attractive bodily features. In her resolute and caring way, she will not get tired of offering 'good food' to all guests who visit her house. While we sit over another breakfast plate, she accounts her once in a lifetime attempt to lose weight at a popular local institute. "Listen, if nobody there can tell me how much points mi haffi count fi ackee

and saltfish[7]or brown stew chicken [falls into Patois], what sense does it mek?"[8] While Ms. Brown internalized certain Eurocentric notions concerning her bodily practices (especially with regard to her hair), her traditionally practiced Jamaican 'food culture' as well as the related belief systems of health and wellbeing have immunized her to accept a thin body as beautiful. Although she attempts to balance varying cultural understandings about food intake and health, her experience at the dietary institution uncovers a continual absence or ignorance of those institutions concerning varying ethnic food cultures. The Eurocentric 'standard image' of dieting with specific food products leads to the exclusion of people who already account as ethnic minorities. Furthermore, besides socio-cultural values, food in childhood days was never available in abundance. Therefore, many older Jamaicans like Ms. Brown find it valuable and great comfort in eating as much as they like. However, there is less awareness of the fact that food quality differs significantly between North America, where high-quality food is costly and not affordable for her, and Jamaica, where local and organically grown food, as well as free-range meat, is a given circumstance, especially in the rural areas.

7 Note: Ackee and saltfish, Jamaica's national dish containing the Ackee fruit and dried, salted codfish.

8 Translation: It doesn't make sense to count points if there is no information on specific foods/dishes.