

What is your name?

Leah Dodds

What is your gender?

Female

What ethnicity do you identify as?

Afro Caribbean, Dominican

What race do you identify as?

Black

Where were you born?

Dominica

Where were your parents born?

Dominica

Is your blackness unique or does it have similarities to other ethnicities?

My blackness is unique but it also does have similarities with other ethnicities. Being of French origin as well as British origin is not necessarily unique, but I think the manifestation of being Dominican is a little bit different. I think it's unique through all different foods that we came up with like Sancoche and we have a very special version of kalalou that we use at home. But there are some similarities that we have with the Haitian people as well, like our language. We speak a little bit of broken French, which we call Creole, which is very similar to the Haitian Creole language. Also through our music, like Zouk, but we have our own music in Dominica called bouyon. So, I would say we have uniqueness in different aspects, but if you search for the origins of where we came from, I think we can definitely find some similarities.

Do you feel like your blackness is questioned? If so, what aspects?

Yeah. I think my accent is definitely questionable because when people first hear it, it sounds kind of African and it's almost kind of Haitian, but it also sounds Caribbean. So I think that's why it's questionable; as in, where are you from? Dominica is 100% maybe 99.9% black so for me I was brought up in a black community. I wasn't called Black back home, we just all consider ourselves black by default. It was only when I came here that I really took on identity of being black.

Do you believe there to be an implicit or explicit hierarchy of blackness? i.e. Is Afro-Cuban seen as lower than African-American in society?

Yeah but that is different for every country. In Dominica, it may not be as emphasized as the US for sure, but there's definitely a hierarchy. I think it comes from who was there first. If you came as a migrant, I think you by default become the lower hierarchy no matter who you are. So if you're white and you're coming to a predominantly black community, you're going to be at the bottom even though you are white and they're considered to be stereotypically higher. So I think it's about the whole migrant movement. And I'll give you an example. In Dominica for sure, there's a hierarchy between Haitians and Dominicans. Even though we both identify as black, we see ourselves a little bit higher up than the Haitians.

Did you grow up in a house or apartment?

A house.

How many people lived there?

A total of 8 in the entire house.

Which of the following rooms were in your living space? Bedroom, Bathroom, Kitchen, Dining Room, Living Room, Den, Foyer, Library, Office, Front Porch, Back Porch, Balcony, Basement, Laundry Room, Front Yard, Back Yard

Bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, front porch, laundry room, back yard.

What activities did you participate or witness in the kitchen or on the porch that is unique to your culture? If you did not have a formal porch, was there a communal space that acted as a porch?

Something we do a lot is hair. I do my mom's hair, I'll do my hair on the porch. It's the first place that you entertain guests, but that's not unique. I think it's just something that we all do in the Caribbean.

A Spectrum of Blackness

Interview with Leah Dodds
by Gabriel Soomar

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What type of non-conventional activities did you participate or witness in the kitchen, on the porch? If you did not have a formal porch, was there a communal space that acted as a porch?

I think conventional just cooking right? That's what we do in kitchen, so I don't know of anything unconventional.

What is your relationship to water?

OK, so that's funny because back home if somebody doesn't bathe as often, we ask them what is their relationship to water? Do you have one because clearly you're not bathing. So I have a very close relationship with water. But I love the water. Dominica has a lot of water so growing up, something I really valued was getting time to go to the river just to reflect. Going to the lake and just watching it and thinking about life and pondering and reflecting on the nature and beauty of God. So I love everything to do with water.

In what spaces do you feel liberated?

I feel liberated in space that reflects Dominica or any that reflects broad nature.

In what spaces do you feel restricted?

My bedroom. But beyond my house, I feel restricted in very crowded places or very like closed off places.