

FOUR WOMEN SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON INTERRACIAL DATING



BY KIRA BROWN

Have you ever dated outside your own race? Do you prefer a certain race or ethnicity opposed to others? Do you routinely check your same ethnicity box in those dating profiles, again and again? The evolution of interracial relationships in the past 20 to 30 years is interesting: A report released this year by the Pew Research Center found there has been a tremendous increase in interracial marriages since 1980, the first year that such statistics were available to the public. Stop and think: In the dating race to find someone special, do you check the same box again and again when looking for a mate?

Many of us have a picture of what we think our soulmate looks like — race, style of dress, occupation, financial success. We form these imaginary perfect mates from television, movies, pop culture, friends, family and the other relationships in our lives. But when we hold on too tightly to what our love “should” look like, we often ignore the potential to start a great relationship with someone who doesn’t fit that image, or worse, we disregard the most important aspect of a loving relationship — that is, what true love should *feel* like, not *look* like.

The finish line in the dating race should be to fall in love with the other person’s heart, beyond physical and ethnic differences. Heart-centered characteristics like kindness, affection, and understanding, as well as how he or she adds joy to your life; challenges and inspires you to grow; stands by you when you’re down; gives you the freedom to be yourself; communicates; and respects your individuality are most important. And of course, how much fun you have together. To find a special heart-to-heart connection, it may be time to check outside the same old box for something surprisingly wonderful.

Kira Brown is a freelance writer based in Phoenix, Ariz.

BY RACHEL KHONA

As an Indian-American, I’m very proud of my heritage and I’m happy to share my culture with others. But when guys try to use my race to pick me up or justify their cultural acumen, it’s a total turnoff.

Many men actually mistake me for Latina. I love Latin culture, but Latina I am not. I’ve had countless (non-Latino) guys come up to me and start speaking Spanish in an attempt to impress me. A guy once went on and on about how much he loved

Latina women. When he finished rambling, I asked him why he was talking to *me* since I’m Indian. He was embarrassed and speechless.

Some men don’t believe I’m American (especially when I’m in Europe). Instead of asking what my ethnicity is, they ask me where I’m from. As far as I’m concerned, I’m from New Jersey and I’m American. I was raised here; my cultural viewpoints all stem from being an Indian-American, not an Indian. But many times, “New Jersey” and “America” are not satisfactory answers. The men often follow up with, “No really, where are you from?” Imagine how silly it would be if I were talking to a white guy who told me he was from California and then I said, “No really, where are you from?”

And then there’s the guy who thinks he’s culturally enlightened because he once dated someone Indian, went to an Indian restaurant, or watched a Bollywood movie. An experience with another culture does not make you better or smarter than anyone else. Acting like you are just smacks of pretension.

The best bet when you meet someone of another race? Treat him or her like a person first. And if you’re curious about his or her ethnicity, ask about it. Don’t ever assume.

Rachel Khona is a Brooklyn, N.Y., based freelance writer who specializes in dating, love, sex and relationships.

BY STEPHANIE D. MCKENZIE

Once considered an American cultural taboo, interracial dating has become more common in the last decade. Many individuals profess to “broadening their horizons,” or blatantly state they are “equal opportunity daters.”

As a relationship professional, I’m not concerned with interracial dating. However, what does concern me are the *motives* for dating outside of one’s race. Unfortunately, many men (and some women) have ascribed to stereotypes and generalizations when it comes to connecting romantically, and this proves to be an unhealthy and unrealistic foundation to build relationships upon.

For example, I personally know African-American men who date — or will only date — Latina or Caucasian women because they believe these women will “cater to them.” As an African-American woman, this mindset is what concerns me about interracial dating. It’s not fair to impose certain expectations on someone simply because he or she is a member of a particular ethnic group.

Interracial dating, as with dating in general, should be about two people who are exploring the similarities and differences in their lives, with the hope they can build a lasting relationship. When stereotypes, generalizations, perceptions and untruths are the motives for such pairings, it can negatively impact the dating experience.

If these perceptions are ever revealed to the other party, the results can be detrimental. After all, who would want to date a person who was only interested because of how he or she expected you to act in a relationship?

If we truly hope to date with integrity and to build healthy relationships, then we must be honest with our significant others. And with that hope comes the mandate that we must like or love someone for exactly who he or she is — regardless of race, ethnicity or culture.

Stephanie D. McKenzie is a certified relationship coach based in Houston, Texas.

BY ANDREA PLAID

Having dated interracial for a couple decades, I can boil down my advice to this: Listen.

I met my ex (with whom I had an open relationship) and my current boyfriend (with whom I’m monogamous) through the same interracial dating site. My ex’s profile stated he had dated black women for a long time, so this wasn’t an “experiment” for him. I was intrigued, especially since I’d been with so many white guys for whom I was their experiment or “get out of racism” card.

While still with my ex, I saw my now-boyfriend’s profile on the site. It said he was “half Japanese, half German” and loved “dark-skinned girls.” After a few emails, he and I had an awkward phone conversation with lots of pauses. I asked him if he’d ever dated a black woman before, and he said no. But we agreed on a coffee date anyway.

And we had a great time. More importantly, we wanted to see each other again. By our third date, we even wanted to be monogamous. The ex and I broke up, and my boyfriend and I have been together ever since.

We talk about race together, including the myth of the “model minority,” media stereotypes and self-identity struggles for mixed-race men and women. And we *listen* to each other. We don’t set each other up as the expert on each other’s ethnicity, and we don’t stereotype each other, but we do respect how our particular “racialized” experiences have affected us. In other words, we do our best to see race as part of our total identities, not the totality of our identities.

So, yeah — listen. It just may do your interracial relationship(s) some good.

Andrea Plaid is a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based freelance writer and sexual correspondent for the race and pop culture website Racialicious.