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How do I learn to not judge interracial relationships? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I find that I get a feeling that I do not know how to explain; it is sort of a sad, discouraged feeling, when I see a black man with a white woman. I am a black female adolescent (20 y/o). I am not a racist. Also, I know of many people both black and white who are not racists but feel the same way. I am not angry at interracial couples when I see them together or anything of that sort. How can I be at ease when I see them, besides that it is not my business? I want to know what possible underlying causes can make people feel this way. How do I unlearn this habit?

Sincerely, Learning Not to Judge

Answer

Dear Learning Not to Judge,

Feeling sad or discouraged when seeing a black man with a white woman is actually a very common reaction for many women of color. Artist, actress, and writer Jill Scott calls it “the wince.” She writes in the March 2010 issue of *Essence Magazine*:

“My new friend is handsome, African-American, intelligent and seemingly wealthy. He is an athlete, loves his momma, and is happily married to a White woman. I admit when I saw his wedding ring, I privately hoped. But something in me just knew he didn't marry a sister. Although my guess hit the mark, when my friend told me his wife was indeed Caucasian, I felt my spirit...wince. I didn't immediately understand it. My face read happy for you. My body showed no reaction to my inner pinch, but the sting was there, quiet like a mosquito under a summer dress.”

Being a heterosexual black woman today can be a very complicated and sometimes frustrating experience. Black women face some difficult circumstances in the dating game, so your reaction to seeing a black man with a white woman is not indicative of you being racist and it does not necessarily constitute a “judgmental” attitude. Let's first contextualize these feelings. The context is a history of slavery and deeply embedded stereotypes about black women and men. During the time of slavery and for more than 100 years after, a black man could be lynched for simply looking at a white woman. During the same time period, white men regularly raped black women. These realities have created stereotypes that devalue black women and place white women on a

pedestal.

Many heterosexual black women report a preference to date and marry black men, for lots of reasons. First, in a society like the U.S. where racism is still pervasive, having a partner who shares a similar experience, understands the nuances of it, and has the ability to bear witness to his partner's experience of it, is of prime importance for many people of color. Research has shown that a white person will be much less capable of noticing more subtle instances of racism than a black person or other person of color would. These more "subtle" racist slights are generally more frequent than overt racism, but they are equally (if not more) damaging because they tend to be invalidated by white people and by the larger society. Black women report preferring black partners also because of a shared cultural connection, a desire to raise children who are connected to their culture, or even a desire to be with someone who understands black women's hair. For some readers, a discussion about hair may seem trivial but for many black women, having the "hair talk" feels tiring and is symbolic of other gaps in understanding that wouldn't be an issue with a black partner.

Still there are more reasons why black women express a strong desire to date black men. Many black women wonder if dating across the racial line would feel like abandoning black men. Also, many black women simply report that they experience stronger physical, emotional, and/or spiritual attraction to other black people. Having this deep love for and connection to others within your own community is not racist and it is not judgmental. In a society that still harbors anti-black racism, it is a sign of strength and self-love.

So why might these preferences for a black partner lead to feelings of sadness or discouragement when seeing a black man with a white woman? Here are a few reasons to consider. First, this sight might reinforce those negative stereotypes about black women's beauty and desirability. Second, black men are also less likely, overall, than their white counterparts to marry. Third, institutionalized racism has also created a scarcity of available black men, particularly in your age group. For example, research shows that education gaps exist between black women and black men, especially among those with a college degree. While there are certainly other potential reasons for your reactions, these examples may help illuminate the situation.

This collection of factors gives black men more options than black women. A desirable black man who ends a relationship with one woman is likely to find many others available; that may not be the case for black women. So it seems that black men are able to "play the field" for longer than black women. When prospects sometimes seem dim, it's possible that you too have felt this pressure or lack of dating options, which can lead to fears of always being alone.

How to change these feelings? It may be that understanding the larger context helps. These feelings you have are not the result of some shortcoming in you, but are a very common reaction that comes from generations of experiencing racism. The sight of an interracial couple perhaps symbolizes all of this, but remembering that the couple you are seeing are not themselves the cause of your sadness, may help. Knowing that sometimes the dating pool sometimes feels smaller than it really is may bring some peace. Finally, you may want to consider finding a counselor or therapist to help you process your feelings. There are therapists that are well versed in these issues and can help you process your feelings and focus on how you want to move

forward.

For more on this dilemma, check out Jill Scott's piece in [Essence](#) [2].

Take care,

Alice!

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