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Life

Edited by Liz Brody



Race & Dating: It's Complicated

How "woke" are we about love? Victoria Carter's journey may surprise you.



One crappy October morning, I was sitting at my desk in the production office for the film I was working on (pretending to be busy), when I opened a link from a friend to an OkCupid blog. The dating site, which I'd been on forever, had collected internal data on how much a user's race affected the response rate she'd get after making the first contact. When I read the results, all I could think was: Everybody hates black women!

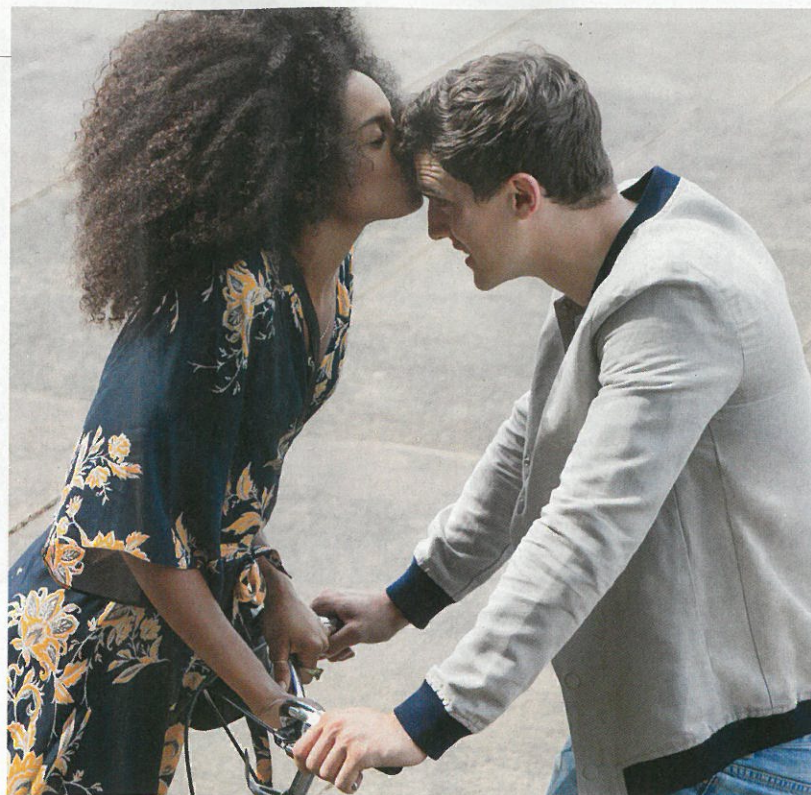
Their chart made it painfully clear: When a woman on the site sends a message, her likelihood of getting a response is much higher if she's any race but black. Men answered messages from other women—Asian, white, Hispanic, everyone—with average reply rates between 42 and 50 percent. Black women like me? Only 34 percent. Even among black men we came in last. I remember looking around at the people in my all-white department and thinking, My God, no matter what I do to try to meet someone, at the end of the day, the main thing people see is that I'm black.

The data made me feel hopeless about finding a partner. And then there was my own baggage: Up to age 25, my attempts at dating—and I say "attempts" because they weren't working—had almost exclusively been with white folks (men and women; I'm queer). I found black people attractive, but I didn't feel I had much in common with them. And the people in my white hipster bubble I thought I had so much in common with? Now I wasn't so sure.

But as hurt as I felt, I would eventually look back at this as the start of a journey that would change the way I saw myself.

Jeff Goldblum, So Sexy

I grew up in Palo Alto, the predominately white, affluent city in Northern California that's home to Stanford University. It was idyllic in some ways—I can't thank my parents enough for busting their asses through far more intolerant times than my own to make it our home—but being an "other" in a nearly homogeneous community had a profoundly destabilizing effect on my identity. I didn't recognize myself in the portrayals of black life I saw in pop culture, the few other black kids at my schools couldn't understand why I



Love transcends: While 11 percent of Americans think interracial marriage is bad for society, 43 percent say it's a good thing.

"talked so white," and nobody got why my first celebrity crush was Jeff Goldblum in *The Fly* (so scary, so sweaty, so sexy—am I right?). And while I went full Becky in my youth, my older brother fell deep into Asian culture—Asian drag racing and, yes, Asian girlfriends. My parents, who'd hoped we would hold on to our culture, were like, "What did we do wrong?"

After a while I began to ask that same question of myself. From my first double date in sixth grade to a couple of women in college and various male "sleep friends"

(a term my mom came up with because she finds *f-ck buddy* unsavory), none of my romantic encounters turned into a real relationship, despite my best efforts. I met one of those sleep friends at a bar during my twenty-seventh birthday party. He was supercute—I have a weakness for white dudes with long hair—and we talked all night about metal, *The Lord of the Rings*, and skateboarding, and finally I asked if he wanted to come over and watch *Kindergarten Cop*. He did. We hooked up off and on for about a year; I really wanted him to be my boyfriend. But it became clear he was fine with the sleep-friend situation we had, so I stopped seeing him.

That kind of thing was typical. I became convinced there was something deeply

wrong with me, but I didn't know what it was. I felt like I was walking around with something in my teeth and no one was telling me. When I thought about whether my race was a factor in my relationships, the idea made me panicky and sick. My biggest fear was that no one wanted to choose me because I was black, and yet I felt guilty for doing the same thing, since the only black person I'd ever dated was that boy in sixth grade. The truth was, at the time I felt I shared a stronger commonality with people who were white. But did they feel that bond with me? And was that enough?

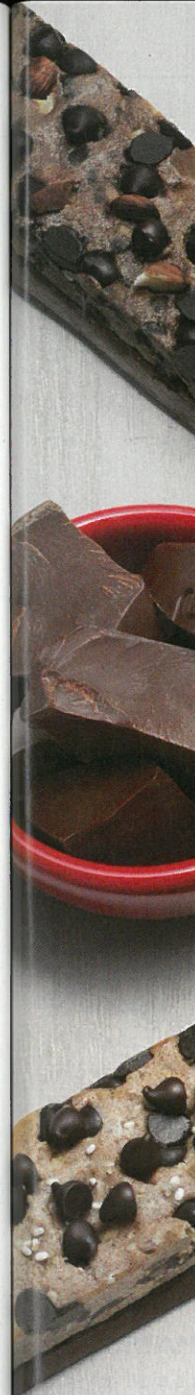
How Do I Date Black People?

At first I ignored the OkCupid blog post, but it put a pin on the race issue, like a little red flag I'd be forced to come back to. And things shifted in me after the killing of Trayvon Martin, as more and more black folks got shot and tensions between the police and people of color reached a fever pitch.

I was stuck in traffic on the Long Island Expressway, listening to *The Brian Lehrer Show*, when I had "the moment." It was 2014, and the video of Eric Garner dying in Staten Island after a police choke hold had just surfaced. All of these people were calling in to say that Garner had been breaking the law, he was resisting, the police officer was right to do what he did. I felt angry. I also found

88%

of people ages 18 to 34 would consider dating outside their race, a Fusion poll shows.



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myself identifying with Garner. That was a big deal for me—and it was the moment I realized how much I *do* have in common with people of color. And if I believed the police should judge each situation free of bias, then I had to look at my own dating decisions that way too.

I asked a good friend who is mixed race, “How do I start dating black people?” She laughed at me: I was living in the artsy, mostly white Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, and she gently suggested I try hanging out in other places as a first step. So I started going to bars frequented by black folks, and I briefly tried clicking the “only African American” box on dating sites before deciding to have no race settings (the first person I went out with after I started this process was Asian).

I would love to tell you that as a result of my new, expanded horizons, I’ve met my true love. I haven’t. But I *have* grown, and so have my relationships with other black people. On dates, we’ve talked about things like “code switching” (people taking on different personalities or dialects depending on who they’re with) and how to fit into the environment you’re in without having to erase who you really are. I’ve felt we could relate in ways I couldn’t with a white partner. This doesn’t mean I won’t date white people. I’m open, and I think *everyone* should try to be. (I doubt decisions to date within one’s group are conscious for most people; racial bias is likely ingrained. After hundreds of years of social conditioning, the same way the brain says “hot, don’t touch” when it sees fire, it may say “not for me” when presented with a potential partner of another race.) I’m not saying you have to make a solemn resolution to date a person outside your race this year; I’m just saying you should stop assuming you won’t. You might be surprised where you find connection.

When things don’t work out now, I try not to get defeated by that OkCupid data: Instead I tell myself that I’m not looking for those dudes who rate black women poorly. And I feel more prepared to fall in love. When I do, I will have made that choice from a fully formed place, and I’ll be with my partner because I truly love him or her, not because I don’t love myself. Which reminds me: I hear

Jeff Goldblum is into younger women. Do you think he’s on Tinder? **G**



Victoria Carter now lives in San Francisco.

Are We Biased When We Date?

Yes, but things are improving. Here’s a look at our semi-enlightened hearts.

We’re far from a postracial America, but plenty of data does suggest that, at least in our hearts, there are glimmers of progress. “Google searches about race and dating are 20 percent higher this decade than they were the previous decade,” says Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, author of *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are*, who analyzed this data for *Glamour*. (Some of those searches: “How to tell your parents you’re dating someone of a different race” and “What does the Bible say” about it.) Statistics also confirm that, more than ever, Americans are dating and marrying outside their own race, with sites like interracialdatingcentral.com designed specifically to help. And surveys show acceptance of interracial love is at an all-time high. More signs of progress:

In friendship:

54%

of millennials (ages 18 to 29) say they have friends of another race, according to the Pew Research Center. That’s true of only 48% of people ages 30 to 49, and 33% for ages 65 and up.

In dating:

93%

of millennials agree with the statement, “I think it is all right for blacks and whites to date each other”—more than the 86% of Gen Xers (ages 37 to 52) who say so.

54%

of people ages 18 to 34 say they’ve gone out with someone of another race, a Fusion survey of 1,000 people found.

In marriage:



1 in 7

new marriages comprise spouses of two races or ethnicities, more than double the ratio in 1980.



1 in 12

of all marriages in America are between spouses of different races and ethnicities.

Among all newlyweds, **9%** of whites, **17%** of blacks, **26%** of Hispanics, and **28%** of Asians married outside their group.

In our futures:

26 million

Americans will be multiracial in 2060, predicts the U.S. Census Bureau—triple the 8 million multiracial people counted in 2014.



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