Parents don't approve of interracial relationship

Alice,

My question is about interracial relationships. I came here from a really small town, very conservative? well, you get the idea. Now, my second week in, I met the most wonderful man. Only he is black. We have been dating now for over a year. He treats me wonderfully but I still get odd looks from people and my parents really don't approve.

I told them it shouldn't matter what color his skin is if I love him, but their small town values seem to say otherwise. How can I cope with the odd looks and my parents without losing my man?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Unfortunately, there are still many people who judge others based on their skin color, religion, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, or race, not to mention lots of other characteristics. Sometimes, even people who are generally open-minded behave in judgmental ways when they are faced with issues of diversity in their own family. This can certainly be frustrating, and, in fact, hurtful when the judgment is directed toward you and someone you care about.

You mentioned that the man you've been dating treats you wonderfully. Have you spoken to him about your concerns? Part of any healthy relationship is communicating about the things you find challenging in your lives? both together and apart. You might start by saying what you said here, that it shouldn't matter what color his skin is, because you love him, but that sometimes you feel like people react strangely when you are together. Perhaps he has also noticed this, and the two of you can strategize together how you want to deal with it. On the other hand, maybe you need to discuss your own concerns about being in an interracial relationship. It's possible that you are sensing negativity coming from other people because you have some level of discomfort yourself. Having an honest discussion with your boyfriend can help you become more aware of your own feelings in this area.

You might also want to express your disagreement with your parents' views, assuring your guy that you care for him and value your relationship. Of course, approval and support from families can mean a lot, too. Talking with your boyfriend might help you to formulate some ways to broach the subject with your parents. If you do decide to talk with your parents, pick a private place and a time when you are all feeling calm. Approaching the subject right after
they've made a heated comment might lead you to respond in an angry, defensive way. You may also want to talk, at least at first, without your boyfriend present. This can help you and your parents to be honest and really understand each other's views. Remember to clearly let them know how their opinions and comments make you and your man feel. You might try saying, "You know, I really care for so-and-so, and I wish you'd trust my judgment. Some of the great things in our relationship are (fill in the blanks). His background is part of what makes him unique and special." If your parents persist, it might help to find out why they have the notions they do. Exploring their past experiences with people from backgrounds different from theirs could help; they'll have a chance to share their ideas, and you'll gain insight into their motivations.

In the end, though, what really matters is how you feel about your boyfriend, and how he feels about you. If your parents and others around you stubbornly stick to the "small town values" you describe, they are missing out on sharing in your life and the richness of your relationship. You and your boyfriend will have to decide whether or not you can ignore the negative reactions and focus instead on finding friends and family who will support you.

Alice!
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