



WALTER DUVAL &
KAREN EPPS-DUVAL

Cross-Cultural Relationships

It's Not All Black & White

BY ALLISON HORTON

Walter Duval, an airline employee and a Haiti native who moved to Chicago at 11, grew up in a strict Haitian family that “didn’t want to cut the umbilical cord” and kept their children close to the nest. Karen Epps-Duval, his African-American wife of 15 years, said she grew up with a little more freedom, a cultural difference that could lead to a conflict when their 13-year-old daughter grows up and wants to date.

“We will probably bump heads then because he will probably be more strict with her,” said Epps-Duval, 42, a beauty adviser for Walgreens in Chicago.

There’s been growing media spotlight on the perceived difficulty many Blacks face finding mates and getting married. Celebrities such as Chilli, of the popular ‘90s R&B group TLC, and Pepa, of the pioneer rap duo Salt-N-Pepa, each have reality series showcasing their quest to find love.

One solution that is often explored is dating someone from another race or culture.

The rate of Black newlyweds who married people outside their race has nearly tripled since 1980, according to a study about new marriages in 2008 compiled by the Pew Research Center. Among all newlyweds in 2008, 16 percent of Blacks married someone whose race or ethnicity was different from their own, compared to 9 percent of Whites,

26 percent of Hispanics and 31 percent of Asians, according to Pew Research.

But this issue is not just Black and White — not just with interracial dating but also in cross-cultural romances, challenges can be unique.

“Cultural differences may come into play when there are major issues that can be very significant,” said Karyn Langhorne Folan, author of *Don’t Bring Home A White Boy: And Other Notions That Keep Black Women From Dating Out*, who noted that there can be broad expectations within cultures regarding child rearing and gender roles within the family.

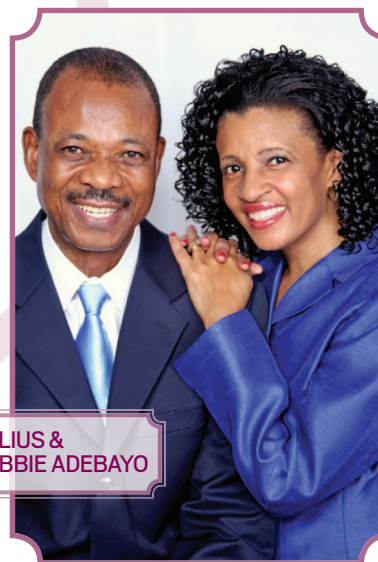
“But if you have enough common ground then usually you can find ways to talk through, negotiate and navigate those differences in ways that allow the relationship to proceed,” Folan said.

For Debbie Adebayo, who is African-American, and her husband, Julius, who is Nigerian, their shared faith helps them to overcome cultural differences, the Adebayos said.

Debbie said she was hesitant — at first — to date Julius. “I would not have picked someone outside of my culture.”

Debbie said she had to “take a step back” when Julius first took her shopping at a Nigerian grocery store. Describing herself as a finicky eater, she found Nigerian food, such as dried shrimp and stockfish (dried and fermented) challenging.

How did they resolve this before they married about 5 years ago? They compromised — Debbie, 55, regularly cooks



JULIUS &
DEBBIE ADEBAYO

American food, which Julius, 63, eats, but most of his food is still Nigerian, which he prepares himself.

"We are always trying to reach that common ground," said Debbie, founder of the Singles Pleasing the Lord ministry in Chicago, which helps singles find fulfillment and learn the responsibilities of married life. "My husband doesn't force me to learn to cook or eat it. It works for us," she said about Julius, who is a church pastor in Lombard, Ill.

Folan said that there can be an advantage in interracial and cross-cultural relationships.

"You know upfront that you are different, whereas sometimes we assume that we are more alike with people who

look like us than we really are," Folan said.

This awareness can help couples focus on discussing and resolving different expectations, Folan said.

One thing Cory "Coco Brother" Con-drey noticed about his Puerto Rican in-laws was that they greet each other with a kiss.

"In our culture, you really don't see that," said Cory, the African-American host of two nationally syndicated radio shows and the Sunday morning BET TV show, *Lift Every Voice*.

Cory, 33, and his wife, gospel artist Joann Rosario, 36, have been married two years. Cory said he's inspired by how family-focused the Hispanic culture is.

"Growing up, we were always pro-family," Cory said. "I thought my family was tight. This is on a whole other level. They do everything together — work, stay, communicate and pray together."

Cory said he is learning Spanish and he and his wife plan to teach both cultures to their daughter, who turns 1 this year.

And he says that, sometimes, race preferences can put limits on potential perfect matches. "In order to find love, if you are looking only at Black or White, then sometimes you can miss it. You have to open yourselves up to the possibilities of what life can be."

Allison Horton is a freelance writer who lives in Chicago.



CORY CONDREY & JOANN ROSARIO