

Christelyn D. Karazin Discusses How 'Swirling' Can Help those in Interracial Relationships



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SWIRLING

How to Date, Mate, and Relate
Mixing Race, Culture, and Creed

CHRISTELYN D. KARAZIN and JANICE RHOSHALLE LITTLEJOHN

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By Daniela Agurcia

These days, maintaining a healthy and long term relationship is tough work. Not only is it hard to stay committed for a long time, but it's also difficult to overcome the criticisms from the world around you. Now, imagine being in a relationship with someone of a different race. Even though we'd like to think our society is wholeheartedly accepting of interracial relationships – we know it isn't always that simple. We had the chance to interview one of the authors, Christelyn D. Karazin, of *Swirling*, a book about interracial relationships and what to expect once you are in one. *Swirling* isn't only insightful, but it is a guidebook on how to approach various situations you will find yourself in when involved with someone of a different race. *Swirling* is an honest book that many people can find comfort in.

What triggered you to write 'Swirling' ?

It really boiled down to the experiences that I had in my life. I didn't think that they could be so unique that other women weren't going through this too. I wondered if other people were also worried about meeting their partner's parents for the first time in an interracial relationship or even being stared at. There was just nothing out there about this, and I've always wanted to be the type of person to share my experiences. I wanted it to be the 'what to expect when expecting' but for "swirling" couples, people who were engaging in interracial relationships for the first time. I wanted them to have a guidebook, something they could go back to and reference about certain things as well as to read other people's stories. Sometimes when you're in a relationship where the person is from a different culture, race, or religion you can feel isolated. I think it's natural to look for resources that will shed light on what other people have gone through in a similar situation.

Related: [5 Don't Tips For Interracial Dating](#)

Do you think that 'Swirling' is just what society needs in this day in age?

Yes, I do. Just look at the data. Interracial relationships are the highest they've been in American history. The world is changing. While studies are showing that people are more amenable to interracial relationships, it's still rather new. You have people who have been raised in the 60's, 70's and 80's who would've never dreamed of dating outside their race. And now you have the situation with social networking where you're able to connect with someone from the UK, and you can fall in love with them and get married. You have these situations, which make the world smaller and facilitate those connections that may never have been there before.

My mother-in-law had never associated with a black person before. She grew up in Manhattan in the late 1940s. There's a funny story in the book of how her and my father-in-law went to the south for a little while and she had to wash her clothes at the laundry mat. Outside it said, "colors only." And she asked, "Where do I wash my colored clothes?" And they told her, "lady that's for colored folks." She didn't know. She was raised completely colorblind. It was a new experience. She had always been around a very homogenous society, so when her son brought me home, it was something that she had to get used to. But, she went out and bought books on interracial relationships. She was really worried for her son. She thought that it would make his life super hard.

What would you say is the most important advice that your book offers for those who are struggling in this type of relationship?

The first and main thing is that you have to choose character above color. Once you do that, you're able to field out a whole bunch of people who wouldn't be good for you. Second thing is, don't let race be the complete center of every conversation that you have. Race shouldn't be something you

concentrate on the first or second date. You need to get to know each other. You need to leave your racial baggage at the door. Unless your date is 150 years old, they have nothing to do with racial issues of the past. Third thing is, that you have to be prepared. People are going to scrutinize your relationship, be curious, fascinated, or envious. They're going to ask questions, and you have to be prepared for it. You have to sort of look at it with humor, not necessarily that they're trying to be malicious. If you're always looking for negativity, you will find it. The key is to always focus on you and your mate and not to focus on other people. You have to let it be about you guys. Because people read your body language. If they feel that you are insecure about the other person, they'll sense that something isn't right.

How do you feel about celebrities in interracial relationships?

They're very validating. If you see it on TV, you think that it must exist because it's on TV. It also gives people exposure to something they might not necessarily see in their neighborhoods. You can see how things have changed through commercials and interracial families. Marketers and people who pitch TV shows are looking at the data like we are. They know the world is changing and that these partnerships exist. They have money, so they need to cater to them too. It's kind of like a perpetual thing: life imitates art, and art imitates life.

What would you say is the number one mistake people make when they enter an interracial relationship?

The number one mistake is when they get into an interracial relationship simply because of their skin color. Preferences are fine, but it's when you have a disdain for people in your own race. If you're dating interracially for some sort of revenge, then that's a problem. That's the number one reason why it won't work in the long term. You're not seeing that

person as a human being, but as a tool. You're using them.

Related: [How to Master Being in a Relationship](#)

How do you think the approach 'Swirling' takes is different then other books on interracial relationships?

There are a bunch of books out there on navel gazing. You have books that present the fact that black women should start looking into their options, but there's nothing on what happens after you've made that decision. I'm not in the business of convincing anybody of anything. A person who reads this book has opened their minds and their options already, and they want to know what to expect. Such as specific tips on how to react in certain situations once you have already been in an interracial relationship. It's an actively engaging book, where people can keep going back and forth. We've organized it in 16 chapters, including the single perspective, from my co-author Janice Rhoshalle Littlejohn. She supplied the research and background and I gave the "what to expect" information. It covers pretty much everything.

How has your blog, BeyondBlackandWhite.com, helped you with the insight you provide for the readers in 'Swirling'?

It has been priceless. I started this blog to just write my thoughts on the book as it came along, but it has become this haven for people who are in these relationships. It became a safe place to discuss all of these things. The richness of the comments of the people changed the outline of the book, because I realized where I needed to channel my focus based on the feedback. It's blown up, we get 7 to 10 thousand visits a day.

Do you believe in online dating, and if so how do you think men and women can benefit from this?

I do! I met my husband online. He was just really funny and cute, so I knew he couldn't be a bad person, and it worked out

for us. People have had mixed experiences. But I could say that a huge percentage of specifically black women who have found non-black mates have done so through online dating sites. It's possibly because they're exposed to people they otherwise wouldn't have met. You can get to know the person through the inside out, rather than the outside in. There are a lot of people who feel more comfortable expressing themselves through their writing than they do outloud.

To get more detailed and insightful advice on interracial relationships, purchase *Swirling* at Amazon. Also, visit Karazin's blog, www.BeyondBlackWhite.com.