

Interracial Marriage and Relationships: A Fact Sheet

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Race, as well as culture, ethnicity, and religion, are important factors leading to an increase in diversity seen in today's marriages. As such, it is difficult to isolate the impact of racial differences within a marriage. This Fact Sheet highlights trends and rates of interracial marriages in American society, and discusses possible explanations of these trends.

The trends indicate a greater acceptance for relationships between individuals of different cultural, religious and racial backgrounds. Nevertheless, couples may experience stressors relating to these differences including how their families accept the relationship, which can cause increased divorce rates among couples who intermarry.

Trends in Interracial Relationships and Marriage

America is a nation of incredible diversity, and this diversity has increased significantly in the past 50 years. Because of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the change in immigration laws, cultural interactions between people in the U.S. have also changed. The trends indicate a greater acceptance for relationships between individuals of different cultural, religious and racial backgrounds. Nevertheless, couples may experience stressors

relating to these differences including how their families accept the relationship, which can cause increased divorce rates among couples who intermarry.

Acceptance and commonality of interracial or interethnic marriages are related to the community in which people live. For example, daily proximity and geographic location increases the likelihood of interracial relationships. Other variables that affect the number of interracial marriages can include regional differences (including the region's racial history) and the proportion of racial populations relative to one another. The sex ratio of available partners can also affect the possibility of interracial marriage.

How recently an individual or group has immigrated to the U.S. can be a predictor of an openness (or resistance) to interracial marriage.¹ There appears to be a higher interest in preserving traditional cultural norms among recent immigrants. The ability to speak English also plays a role in the likeliness of an interracial relationship.



Interracial Dating

Little research exists on interracial dating; however, available studies indicate that younger people, African-American and Caucasian men, college students, people from diverse backgrounds and those with a history of interracial dating tend to be the most likely to date someone from a different race.² In general, interracial dating is becoming more widely accepted. The Pew Research Center in 2007 surveyed adults on interracial dating and found an increasing tolerance of dating between Black and White Americans with 83 percent of Americans agreeing that, "It's all right for blacks and whites to date."³

Interracial Cohabitation

There are very few studies that address interracial cohabitation. Most in the field can agree, however, that this area should be investigated as cohabitation becomes more frequent in the U.S. Research shows that cohabiting couples are twice as likely to be interracial or interethnic.⁴ Multiracial individuals are more likely than single-race individuals to cohabit in an interracial relationship.⁵ According to Current Population Survey (CPS) data 2003-2006, 25 percent of couples cohabiting are mixed race couples, and the same racial trends for intermarriage also exist for interethnic couples living together.⁶ Scholars point to the rise in cohabitation rates in the U.S. as a possible explanation for the decline in interracial marriages.

Interracial and Interethnic Marriage

Since 1960, interracial marriages in the U.S. have increased substantially. Prior to that time, less than 1 percent of all marriages were interracial. The

1980s showed a rapid annual increase, but from the 1990s to the present time, interracial marriage rates have declined for some ethnic groups.⁷ This decline can be explained by the influx of immigration during this era (offering more choices of mates within one's own culture) and the rise of cohabitation (see section on Cohabitation).

Out of the 54 million married couples in the U.S., nearly four million are interracial couples.⁸ It is important to note that data taken from the Current Population Survey 2003-2006 can show different results depending on how a researcher manipulates the racial categories. The numbers can vary from four million interracial married couples to over eight million nationally.⁹ It's important to note that respondents were not provided the opportunity to mark one or more racial category in the Census reports from 1960 until 2000. Over time, the way in which people have self-identified with race has changed, often blurring the lines between racial categories. This change could account for some of the incline in interracial marriages over the past few decades.

Although Hawaii has the highest rate of intermarriage (a marriage that may be between people of two races, cultures or ethnicities), proportionally, California, Florida, Oklahoma, Texas and Washington account for the largest numbers of intermarriages.¹⁰

Interracial Divorce

Interracial couples in the United States face unique challenges to marital harmony — those that emanate from partners of different backgrounds seeking

According to a 2005 report from the federal Center for Health Statistics, the rate of divorce for first marriages is slightly higher for interracial couples than it is for couples that marry within their race (31 percent vs. 41 percent at ten years).¹¹

common ground, as well as the stresses from being accepted by family and the larger society. According to a 2005 report from the federal Center for Health Statistics, the rate of divorce for first marriages is slightly higher for interracial couples than it is for couples that marry within their race (31 percent vs. 41 percent at ten years).¹¹

Children of Interracial Marriage

Because of the increase in interracial marriages, there are more children of bi-racial and multiple racial identities. The number of babies born of mixed-race has grown 26 times faster than any other group.¹² During the 2000 census, nearly 6.8 million individuals considered themselves to be of two or more races.¹³ This trend is expected to continue increasing over the coming years. Nearly two-thirds of all people who reported more than one race lived in just ten states with California, New York and Texas accounting for 40 percent of this population.¹⁴

Differences by Subgroup

Differences by Race

Less than 1 percent of all interracially married couples consist of two non-white spouses. Most interracial couples consist of a white spouse with an Asian, Hispanic or black spouse.¹⁵ Of all races in the U.S., Native Americans are most likely to marry outside of their race and currently have a 56 percent intermarriage rate.

Asians in the U.S. have an interracial marriage rate of about 14 percent.¹⁶ Of the six largest specific Asian groups, Japanese have the highest percentage (31 percent) with one or more other races or Asian groups, while only 8.3 percent of the Vietnamese reported multi-ethnic identities.¹⁷ They are followed by blacks (10.4 percent), and whites (3.46 percent). Although the number of black-white marriages has

grown from 55,000 in 1960 to 440,000 in 2005, black–white marriage remains the most unlikely racial combination in the U.S. For example, the number of Hispanic marriages to non-whites (1.75 million) was four times larger than the number of black-white marriages in 2005.

CPS Data 2003-2006 shows that Puerto Ricans are the least likely to be in co-ethnic relationships and Mexicans were most likely, with Cubans and Central/South Americans falling in the middle

The rates of interracial marriages between Hispanics and whites, and between Asians and whites declined from 1990-2000.¹⁸ This period of time also shows inclines in their respective immigration rates.

Differences by Gender

Since 1960, in general women have been more likely to intermarry than males within their own races (except for black women).^{19/20} Most recently, data shows that of those who intermarry, black men are more likely to intermarry than black women.²¹ Recent data also shows that white men are slightly more likely to intermarry than white women, and Native American women are more likely to intermarry than Native American men.²² When the CILS (Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study) regional data was examined in Southern California, it was discovered that females were 1.5 times more likely than males to be in mixed relationships (Note: more than one-quarter of all interracial couples live in CA). Asians show the largest gender gap of all races when it comes to intermarriage. Of Asians who intermarry in America, about 75 percent are women and they are most likely to marry non-Hispanic, white men.

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Differences by Socioeconomic Status

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Differences by Acculturation

Research shows non-whites, who are more acculturated to American mainstream society, are more likely to marry outside of their race or ethnic group.²³ This acculturation includes factors such as an individual's length of stay in the U.S., immigration history, and ability to speak English fluently. For example, Asians that have been in the U.S. longer, such as Japanese and Chinese, are more likely to intermarry than more recent Asian immigrant groups such as the Vietnamese or Koreans.

Differences by Generation

Many researchers have found that intermarriage rates are statistically significant by the third generation following immigration.²⁴ An analysis of first, second and third-plus Asian and Hispanic generations shows that as these generations increase, so do the occurrences of interracial marriages (CPS 2003-2006). However, one recent study found that this relationship is not quite as linear as once thought

when the groups are broken down by age.²⁵

Definitions

Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau uses five categories to define race: (1) White, (2) Black or African American, (3) American Indian or Alaska Native, (4)

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and (5) Asian. According to the Census Bureau, Hispanics—an ethnic group—can be of any race.²⁶

Race – An individual's race is determined by phenotypic characteristics such as skin color, hair type and other physical features. This category is controversial since it relies on biological differences and society's generalized ideas on what is believed to be the characteristics of each race.²⁷

Ethnicity – An individual's ethnicity refers to his or her subscription to the mores and practices of his or her heritage, including race, culture and religion. One might subscribe to multiple ethnicities concurrently, and emphasize one over the other at different points in time.²⁸

Culture – Culture is an individual's belief system and values. These include various identities such as nationality, religion and family country of origin. Socioeconomic, historical, and political factors also influence culture.²⁹

The term "interracial marriage" falls under the larger category of "intermarriage," which encompasses interracial, intercultural, interethnic and interfaith unions. Each refers to the marriage between individuals of a different subgroup.³⁰

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³ Pew Research Center for The People and The Press. (2007).

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⁵ Quian, Z. & Lichter, D. T. (2004). *Crossing Racial Boundaries: Changes of Interracial Marriage in America, 1990 – 2000*. The Ohio State University.

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⁷ Morgan, Charlie V. (2009). *Intermarriage Across Race and Ethnicity Among Immigrants*. El Paso: LFB Scholarly Publishing.

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[population/www/cen2000/briefs/phc-t19/tables/tab01.pdf](http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs/phc-t19/tables/tab01.pdf)

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