

*****Initial and Incomplete Extended Abstract Draft for PAA 2012, Sep 23, 2011*****

Please Do Not Cite and Do Not Post Without Authors' Permission

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Intermarriage—New Facts, New Attitudes

by Wendy Wang and Jeffrey Passel, Pew Research Center

Corresponding author: wwang@pewresearch.org

Abstract

A majority of Americans (63%) are “fine with” their family members marrying someone of any other race or ethnicity. At the same time, a quarter of the public (25%) think that more people of different races marrying each other is a good thing for society and only 14% say that increasing intermarriage is “a bad thing” for society, according to recent Pew Research Center surveys. Using data from the decennial census and American Community survey, we track the incidents of intermarriages in the U.S. since 1980. A record of 14.6% of all new marriages in 2008 were either interracial or interethnic, up from around 7% in 1980. We present the attitudinal data as well as updated results from the 2009 and 2010 ACS by demographic and social characteristics as race, gender, age, and education to shed light on the factors that may account for the trend.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Intermarriage—New Facts, New Attitudes

A record 14.6% of all new marriages in the United States in 2008 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from each other, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of new data from the U.S. Census Bureau. That figure is an estimated six times the intermarriage¹ rate among newlyweds in 1960 and more than double the rate in 1980. Initial results from the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) shows a continuing increase in the intermarriage rate to 15.4% and we expect the 2010 ACS to show a further increase.

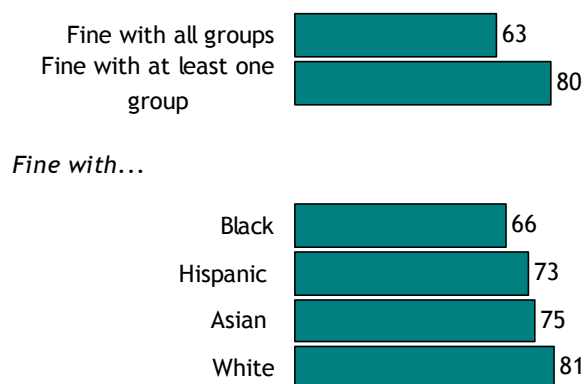
In this poster, we present evidence from public opinion surveys as well as the census counts to show a steady rise of intermarriages in the U.S. in the past several decades. We argue that this dramatic increase has been driven in part by the weakening of longstanding cultural taboos against intermarriage and in part by a large, multi-decade wave of immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

Data for this study come from two sources: Pew Research Center surveys and the decennial census and American Community Surveys. The final paper will include results from the 2009 and 2010 ACS (the latter of which will be the first survey to incorporate results from the 2010 Census. We will also update both the public opinion results. In the final research, we plan to take a deeper look at the gender/race patterns of the intermarriages, especially African Americans and Asians. We also plan to compare couples who marry “out” with those who marry “in” on an array of characteristics, which will help us to understand who are more likely to be in an interracial or interethnic marriage.

The Fading of a Taboo: Today's attitudes and behaviors regarding intermarriage represent a sharp break from the not-too-distant past.

How Would You React if a Member of Your Family Were Going to Marry Someone of a Different Race?

% saying they would be ...



Source: Pew Research Center Race Survey, conducted Oct. 28-Nov. 30, 2009 (N=2,884).

PewResearchCenter

¹ “Intermarriage” refers to marriages between a Hispanic and non-Hispanic (“interethnic”) or marriages between white, black, Asian, American Indian or those who identify as multiple races or some other race (“interracial”). All racial groups in this study are non-Hispanic. For more details see Page 6.

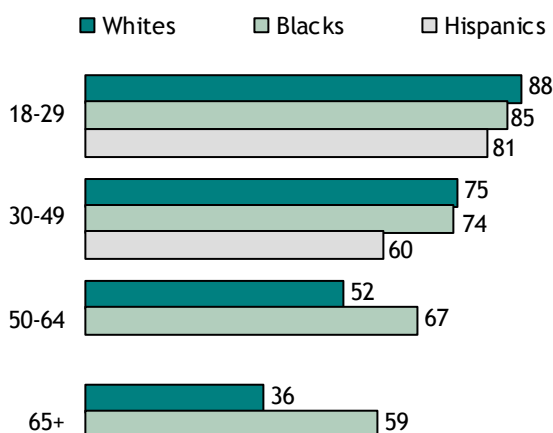
However, attitudinal and behavioral change did not come overnight. As of 1987—two decades after the Supreme Court ruling declaring anti-miscegenation laws in 15 states unconstitutional—just 48% of the public said it was “OK for whites and blacks to date each other.” By 2009, that share had grown to 83%. Acceptance has risen among all age cohorts, but it is highest among young adults. Among adults ages 18 to 32, 93% approve; among adults ages 64 and older, 68% approve.²

As for attitudes about interracial marriage, 63% of respondents a 2009 Pew Research survey said it would be fine with them if a family member married “out” to all three other major racial and ethnic groups tested in the survey, and 80% said they would be fine with a new member of their family who came from at least one of the “out” groups. There was some variability by group. Racial gaps in acceptance have generally narrowed in the past decade. Compared with responses to the same questions in 2001, whites have grown somewhat more accepting of interracial marriage and blacks somewhat less.

Across racial groups, racially conservative views about interracial marriage are strongly correlated with age. Americans ages 50 and over, and particularly those 65 and over, are considerably less accepting of interracial marriage than those in younger age groups. While this is true of blacks, it is more strongly pronounced among whites. Just over half of whites ages 50-64 (52%) and only 36% of whites 65 and older say they would be fine with a relative marrying someone from any other racial groups (this is 15 points and 23 points less than blacks in their age groups, respectively).

Young of All Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds Are More Supportive of Interracial Marriage

% of those who would be fine with a relative's marriage to someone of any other race/ethnicity



Note: Whites include only non-Hispanic whites. Blacks include only non-Hispanic blacks. Hispanics are of any race. Insufficient cases of Hispanics ages 50-64 and 65+ for analysis.

Question wording (asked about race/ethnic groups other than respondent's): How do you think you would react if a member of your family told you they were going to marry ... (an African-American/a Hispanic-American/an Asian-American/a white American)? Would it be fine with you, would it bother you but you would come to accept it, or would you not be able to accept it? Q50a-d. Shown here: the percentage who say “it would be fine” with them to all three other ethnic/racial groups.

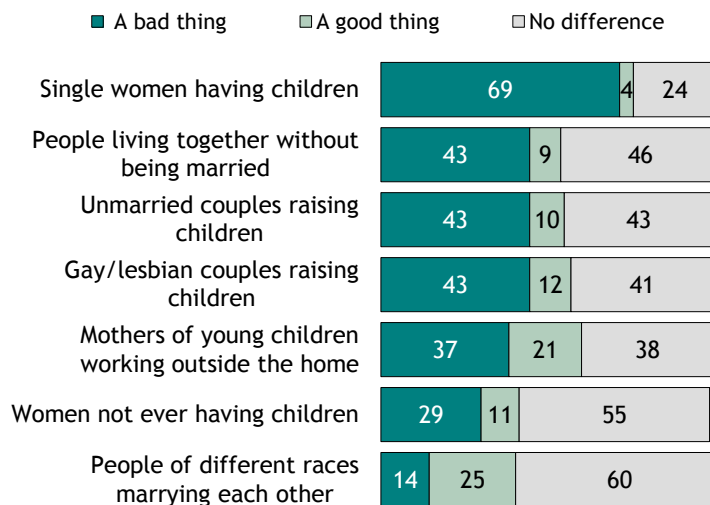
PewResearchCenter

² See Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, “Independents Take Center Stage in Obama Era: Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2009,” May 21, 2009 (<http://people-press.org/report/517/political-values-and-core-attitudes>).

In a 2010 survey, we listed seven recent demographic trends for the public to judge. Compared to other trends, “more people of different races marrying” each other is viewed as the most accepting demographic trends: one quarter think that this is a good thing for our society, and 60% view the trend naturally.

Public Views on Demographic Trends

% saying increase in each is ...



Note: “Don’t know/Refused” responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted Oct 1-21, 2010, N=2,691.

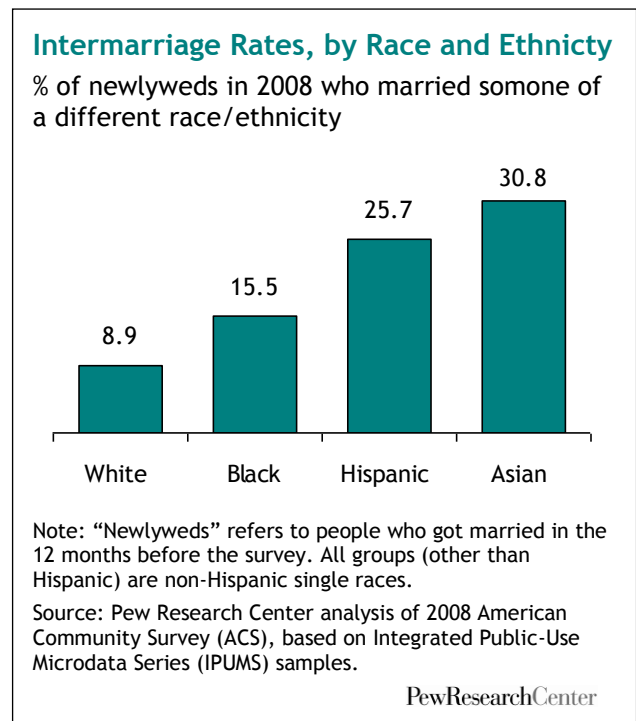
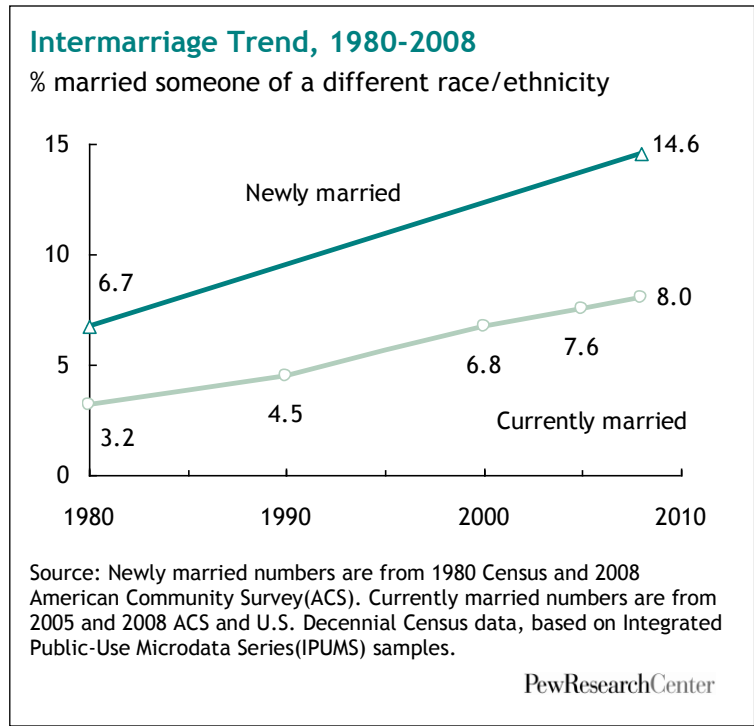
PewResearchCenter

Demographic Trends

In 1961, the year Barack Obama's parents were married, less than one in 1,000 new marriages in the United States was, like theirs, the pairing of a black person and a white person, according to Pew Research estimates. By 1980, that share had risen to about one in 150 new marriages. By 2008, it had risen to one-in-sixty.

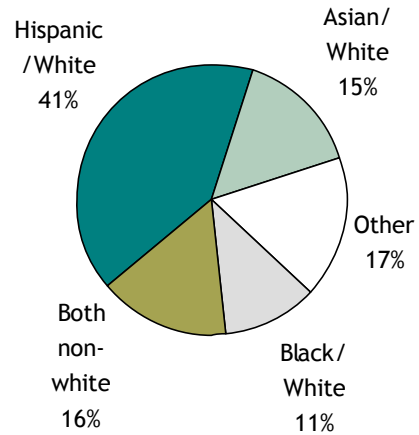
Pairings: Even with that sharp increase, however, black-white couplings represented only about one-in-nine of the approximately 280,000 new interracial or interethnic marriages in 2008. White-Hispanic couples accounted for about four-in-ten (41%) of such new marriages; white-Asian couples made up 15%; and white-black couples made up 11%. The remaining third consisted of marriages in which each spouse was a member of a different minority group or in which at least one spouse self-identified as being American Indian or of mixed or multiple races.

Race, Ethnicity and Immigration: Of the 3.8 million adults who married in 2008, 9% of whites, 16% of blacks, 26% of Hispanics and 31% of Asians married someone whose race or ethnicity was different from their own. For whites these shares are more than double what they had been in 1980 and for blacks they are nearly triple. For Hispanics and Asians, by contrast, these rates are little changed from 1980. High levels of Hispanic and Asian immigration over the past several decades helped



drive both seemingly contradictory trends. For whites and blacks, the new immigrants and (increasingly) their now grown U.S.-born children have enlarged the pool of potential partners for marrying outside one's own racial or ethnic group. But for Hispanics and Asians, the ongoing immigration wave has greatly enlarged the pool of potential partners for in-group marrying.

Intermarriage Types, Newly Married Couples in 2008



Note: "Newly married" refers to people who got married in the 12 months before the survey. All groups (other than Hispanic) are non-Hispanic. "Other" includes American Indian, mixed race, or "some other" race.

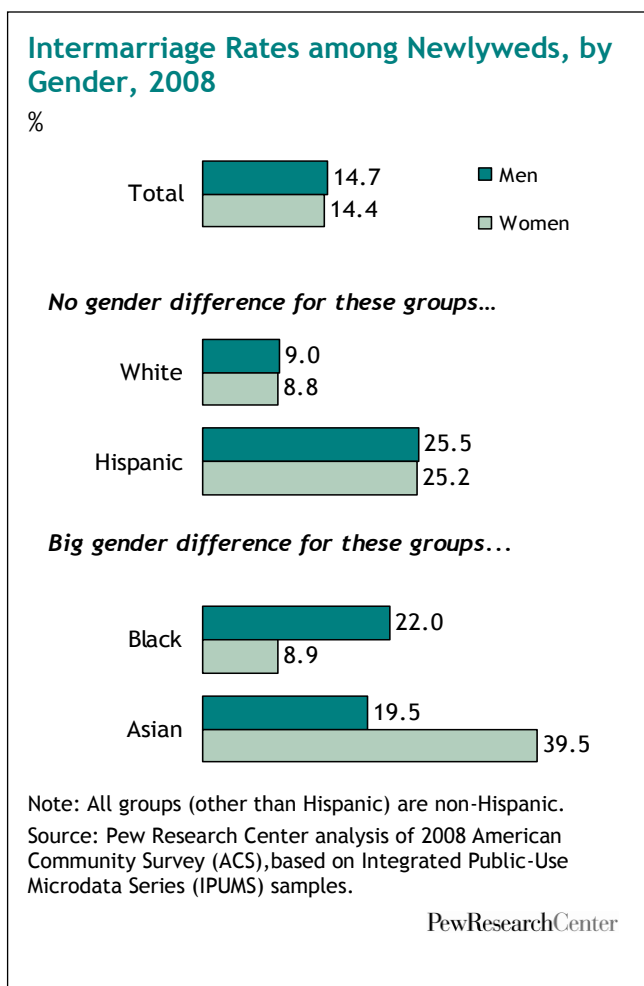
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), based on Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) samples.

PewResearchCenter

Gender: Among blacks and Asians, there are stark differences by gender in the tendency to marry outside their own racial group. Some 22% of all black male newlyweds in 2008 married outside their race, compared with just 9% of black female newlyweds. Among Asians, the gender pattern runs the opposite way. Some 40% of Asian female newlyweds in 2008 married outside their race, compared with just 20% of Asian male newlyweds.

Among whites and Hispanics, by contrast, there are no gender differences in intermarriage rates. About 9% of both male and female white newlyweds in 2008 married a nonwhite spouse, and about a quarter of both male and female Hispanic newlyweds in 2008 married someone who is not Hispanic.

States and Regions: Intermarriage in the United States tilts West. About one-in-five (22%) of all newlyweds in Western states married someone of a different race or ethnicity in 2008, compared with 13% in the South and Northeast and 11% in the Midwest. All nine states with out-marriage rates of 20% or more in 2008 are situated west of the Mississippi River: Hawaii (48%); Nevada (28%); Oregon (24%); Oklahoma (23%); California (22%); New Mexico (22%); Colorado (21%); Arizona (21%); and Washington (20%). (See Appendix III for a 50-state table).



Education: Marrying out is more common among adults who attended college than among those who did not, but these differences are not large. Of all newlyweds in 2008, 15.5% of those who attended college married outside their race or ethnicity, compared with 13.5% of those who completed high school and 11.0% of those who did not complete high school.

Nativity Status: Marrying out is much more common among native-born adults than among immigrants. Native-born Hispanics are more than three times as likely as the foreign born to marry a non-Hispanic. The disparity among native- and foreign-born Asians is not as great, but it is still significant; native-born Asian-Americans are nearly twice as likely as those who are foreign born to marry a non-Asian. Here again, there are sharp gender differences. Among Asian men, the native born are nearly four times as likely as the foreign born to marry out. Among Asian women, the native born are only about 50% more likely than the foreign born to marry a non-Asian.

Education and Intermarriage

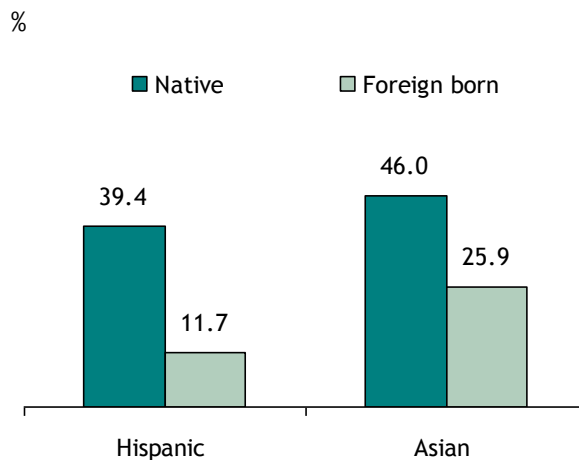
% of newlyweds who married someone of a different race/ethnicity, 2008



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), based on Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) samples.

PewResearchCenter

Hispanic and Asian Newlyweds with a Spouse of a Different Race/Ethnicity, by Nativity, 2008



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), based on Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) samples.

PewResearchCenter

A Note on Terminology

In this report, the terms “intermarriage” and “marrying out”³ refer to marriages between a Hispanic and a non-Hispanic (Hispanics are an ethnic group, not a racial group) or marriages between non-Hispanic spouses who come from the following different racial groups: white, black, Asian, American Indian, mixed race or some other race. All designations are based on self-descriptions by individuals on U.S. Census forms. For the years 2000 and later, when individuals could self-identify on census forms as having more than one race, the race groups include only persons reporting a single race. In these years, there is also another group—persons reporting two or more races. The term “Asian” includes native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. “American Indian” includes Alaska Natives. The terms “black” and “African-American” are used interchangeably in this report, as are the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino.” All references in this report to whites, blacks, Asians and American Indians refer to the non-Hispanic portions of those groups.

³ In popular usage, these phrases may also encompass different pairings from the ones described in this poster. For example, some people might use these terms to describe a marriage between someone of Irish origin and someone of Italian origin; or between a Protestant and a Catholic; or between a Christian and a Jew. Those usages were probably more common in the past than now, but within certain ethnic or religious population enclaves, they persist. For the purposes of this report, however, the term “marrying out” (and the analysis that accompanies the term) is limited to marriages among spouses of different races or marriages between a Hispanic and non-Hispanic.