



Black-white marriages on the rise

By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY
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Black-white marriages are on the rise, a sign that those racial barriers are slowly eroding, but they still lag far behind the rate of mixed-race marriages between whites and other minorities.

"It does suggest that the social distance between the two groups has narrowed," says Zhenchao Qian, a sociology professor at Ohio State University and lead author of a new study on interracial marriages. "The racial boundary is blurred, but it is still there."

The study also found that the share of Hispanic newlyweds who married non-Hispanic whites grew slightly since 1980, but at a slower rate this decade than in previous years.



There are more interracial marriages between blacks and whites, such as that of actors Idina Menzel and Taye Diggs. 2009 photo by Peter Kramer, AP

The share of Asians who married whites dropped. One explanation: Immigration has broadened the pool of potential spouses of the same race and ethnicity.

"If the immigration population had not increased, we would have seen more interracial marriages," Qian says.

The study, published in the October edition of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, finds that in 2008, 10.7% of blacks who married in the past year married whites, compared with 3% in 1980.

Blacks who have completed higher levels of education are more likely to marry whites because they have a greater chance of interacting with them in school, the workplace and neighborhoods where they live — a fact that has been true for other groups for a while but not for blacks, Qian says.

"This doesn't imply that we've moved into a post-racial society," says Daniel Lichter, director of the Cornell Population Center and study co-author. "Even though there's been a rapid increase (in black-white unions), it's still very low."

Almost 34% of Asians who were recently wed in 2008 married whites, and 28% of Hispanics married whites who are not Hispanic.

"Blacks are still the least assimilated," says Roderick Harrison, a demographer at Howard University and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington. "It does suggest that the divide in this country remains between blacks and everybody else."

The study is unique because it analyzed new Census data that identify people who have recently married. Previous research looked at all married couples, including some who married 40 or 50 years ago.

The study also found:

- Gender roles.** Black men are much more likely to marry white women than black women are to marry white men. "That's the least likely combination," Lichter says. The opposite is true of marriages between Asians and whites. Among Hispanics, mixed-race couplings are more balanced.

- Multiracial factor.** Asians and American Indians who are part white are far more likely to marry a white person than a person of their other heritage.

- Living together.** More couples are living together, a trend that is affecting all marriage rates. Without it, the rate of mixed marriages might be higher. "Cohabiting doesn't always lead to marriage," Lichter says.

The findings are a good reflection of where race relations stand, Harrison says. "Marriage is the ultimate indicator of integration."