

# Interracial dating — 5 facts and 5 myths

By Rosalind Cummings-Yeates



You see them everywhere — in videos, grinning through commercials, sashaying through movies, beaming from ads, walking down the street. Look around: There are several attractive models for interracial love beckoning you to notice, from Jen and Ben, to Gap ads, from "Friends," to Lennie Kravitz and Nicole Kidman. Interracial relationships are everywhere. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, interracial marriages more than doubled from 1980-2000, from 651,000 to 1.46 million. That's a lot of intermingling.

So what does this mean for everyday interactions and cultural awareness? Is our society turning into one big, color-blind melting pot? Not exactly. Here are five facts and five myths about interracial dating that explore the reality behind this issue:

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**Myth #1:** Interracial relationships and marriages are pretty common.

**Fact #1:** While acceptance has increased and interracial dating occurs more often than it did decades ago, only a small percentage of people actually marry someone from another race or ethnic group. Despite the numbers and the visibility of mixed race couples, they represent only about 2.9 percent of total marriages, according to the census bureau. In 2002, there were a total of 57,919 marriages and about 1,674 of these were interracial. Even though social trends point to the popularity of multicultural dating, the majority of Americans still marry the guy or girl next door.

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**Myth #2:** Interracial dating means a relationship between a black person and a white person.

**Fact #2:** As recently as 1967, it was illegal to marry a person from another race. The Supreme Court struck down this law in its ruling on the *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia* case in which a white man married a black woman. Because of the U.S.'s painful history of slavery and the taboos that accompanied the institution, most people still think in terms of black and white when it comes to interracial dating. In reality, black-white dating and marriage happens less frequently than it does with other ethnic groups. Marriages between a black and a white person represent less than one percent of total marriages, according to the Census Bureau. On the other hand, Asians, Hispanics and Native Americans marry outside their ethnic group an average of 30-40 percent of the time. Hence, an interracial relationship can refer to an assortment of ethnic and racial pairings.

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**Myth #3:** If you date someone from another race, you can't be racist.

**Fact #3:** Unfortunately, some interracial relationships are actually based on racist beliefs. Stereotypes such as; Asian women being docile and eager to please, African Americans being oversexed and Latinos being fiery and passionate feed all sorts of false assumptions that lead to dating disasters.

Luann, a Filipina who has dated white men, experienced this contradiction first hand. "I dated Steve with the assumption that he respected me as a person and not some Asian caricature. We dated for a couple of weeks and everything was fine until we got into a disagreement in front of his friends. He later told me that he didn't expect that from me and that he thought I would be more reserved. I talk a lot and I'm opinionated. He obviously wasn't paying attention to who I was, but to his own racist expectations."

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**Myth #4:** Interracial dating represents a passing trend related to fashion and being hip.

**Fact #4:** Although some singles do treat interracial relationships as opportunities to appear trendy and cool, the increase of interracial dating with each decade reveals society's growing acceptance and comfort with the situation. These relationships measure the state of race relations in our society. The fact that they have steadily grown since the legalization of interracial marriages in 1967, indicates that interracial relationships are much more than a trend.

According to a survey conducted in 1999 by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 70 percent

of whites and 82 percent of non-whites approve of interracial dating. Marriage however, is a different story. Only 60 percent of whites and 77 percent of non-whites approved of interracial marriage, revealing lingering fears about biracial families and children.

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**Myth #5:** Interracial relationships attract large amounts of prejudice and protest.

**Fact #5:** When interracial couples were less visible in the media and in everyday life, cases of blatant discrimination and disapproval were not uncommon. Now, although discrimination against these relationships does exist, it tends to be more subtle and more often come from family members or within the ethnic group represented.

"I've never had a problem with stares or people denying us service "says Greg, an African American accountant whose girlfriend is white. "My family, on the other hand, is not at all happy with the situation. And if we're out and there is a sista' around, she will most likely roll her eyes and make it clear what she thinks of me."

Although Greg's experience isn't unusual, there are often as many interracial relationships that foster understanding as those that inspire resentment. "My family used to think that Mexican food was the only good thing Mexicans had to offer," admits Cheryl, a white woman married to a Mexican man. "We've been married for four years now and they have been exposed to a wide range of Latino culture — music, art and dance. They now have respect for the people and the culture. It's amazing now that they realize how small-minded and ignorant they had been."

Indeed, interracial relationships often spur cross-cultural acceptance that would probably not happen otherwise. "My parents were not thrilled when I started dating Rose," says Ken of his traditional Jewish family's reaction to his African American girlfriend. "They thought that African Americans were like every stereotype they had ever seen on TV. By simply being herself, Rose opened their eyes to the fact that African Americans can be as intelligent and as successful as everybody else. For her part, Rose now knows all the high holy days and how to make kugel."

As American society changes and the growing numbers of people from various ethnic and racial groups create a population that is much more diverse, interracial dating will continue to bring different cultures and races together. Hopefully, these relationships will serve as bridges rather than barriers to a more enlightened society.