

# High School Seniors' Expectations to Marry



National Center for  
Family & Marriage Research  
Bowling Green State University

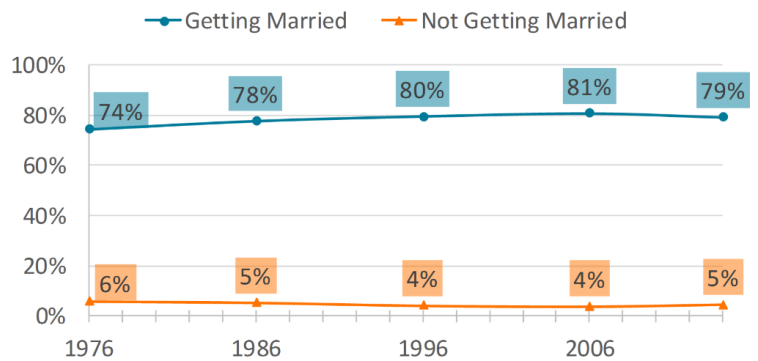
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The marriage rate in the United States has decreased over the past four decades, falling from 76.5 in 1970 to 31.9 in 2014 (FP-15-20). Driven in part by the declining marriage rate and increases in cohabitation, men and women are waiting longer to marry, with some never marrying at all (Lundberg and Pollak, 2013; Lee, 2016). For example, in 1989 27% of women aged 18-49 had never married, climbing to 40% in 2014 (FP-15-17). Despite evidence of a retreat from marriage, most adolescents still expect to marry at some point in the future (Manning et al., 2007). This profile is one in a new 3-part series using Monitoring the Future data to examine almost 40 years of change in high school seniors' expectations and attitudes about marriage and cohabitation. The focus of this profile is on high school seniors' expectations to marry by region of the United States, gender, race/ethnicity, and parental educational attainment.

## Expectations to Marry Over Time

- Over the nearly 40-year time span examined, the vast majority of high school seniors reported they expect to marry at some point in the future. There does not appear to be a retreat from marriage.
- The percentage of high school seniors not expecting to marry has remained low and relatively stable at around 5%. The graph does not show additional respondents who either have "no idea" (19% in 1976 and 16% in 2014) or are already married.

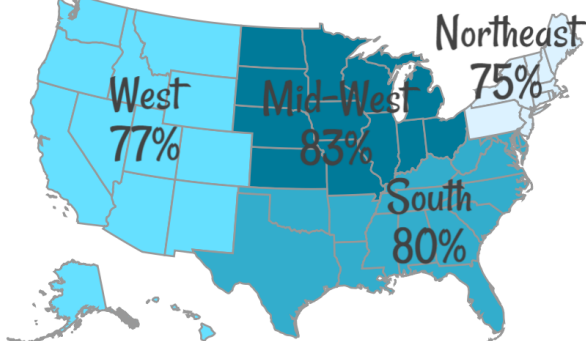
Figure 1. H.S. Seniors' Expectations to Marry, 1976-2014



Source: Monitoring the Future, 1976-2014

## Expectations to Marry by Region, 2014

Figure 2. H.S. Seniors' Expectations to Marry by Region, 2014

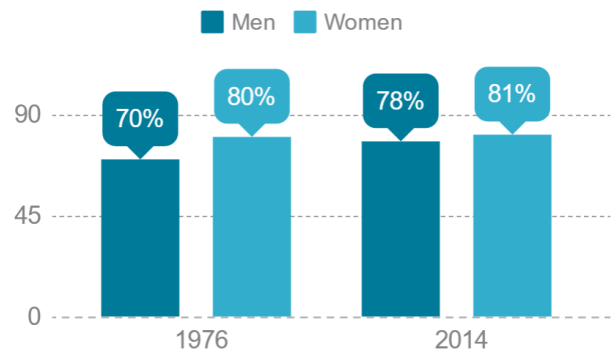


Source: Monitoring the Future, 1976 & 2014

- High school seniors in the Mid-West region were the most often to report an expectation to marry (83%).
- The region with the lowest share of high school seniors who expected to marry was the Northeast (75%).

## Expectations to Marry by Gender

Figure 3. H.S. Seniors' Expectations to Marry by Gender, 1976 and 2014

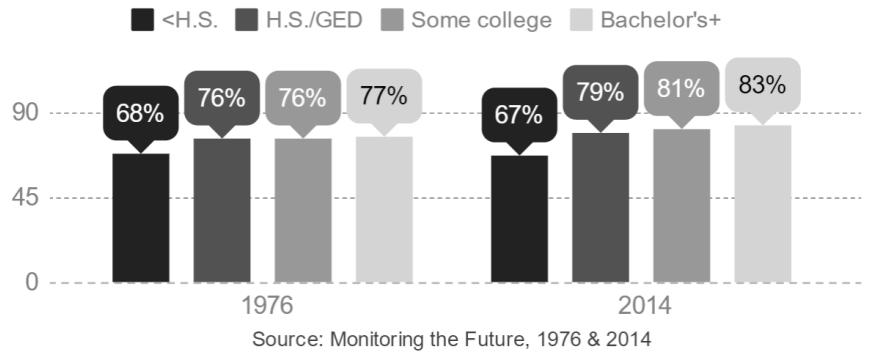


- Across a nearly 40-year time span, the gender gap has narrowed. The reason the gender gap has diminished is men have increasingly expected to marry.
- Today, essentially equal shares of men (81%) and women (80%) expect to marry.

## Expectations to Marry by Parental Educational Attainment

- Higher parental educational attainment corresponds to greater expectations to marry.
- The gap between the lowest and highest educated parents has grown. In both 1976 and 2014, those whose parents had less than a high school education were the least inclined to expect to marry, whereas those whose parents had a Bachelor's degree or higher were the most inclined to expect to marry.

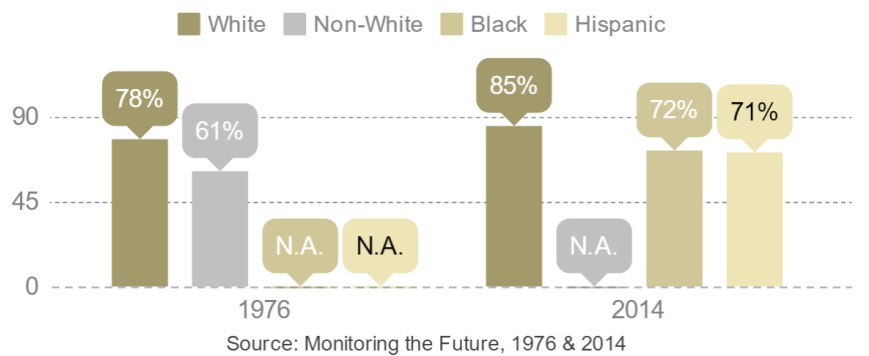
Figure 4. H.S. Seniors' Expectations to Marry by Parental Education, 1976 and 2014



## Expectations to Marry by Race & Ethnicity

- A majority of high school seniors expected to marry, regardless of race. An increase occurred for all race and ethnic groups considered here.
- Consistently, greater shares of Whites reported an expectation to marry than Non-Whites.

Figure 5. H.S. Seniors' Expectation to Marry by Race and Ethnicity, 1976 and 2014



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