Marriages to Same-Sex and Different-Sex Couples: 2019 & 2021
Authors: Krista K. Westrick-Payne and Wendy D. Manning

Marriages to same-sex couples were declared legal in all states by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015. Starting in 2019 the US Census Bureau included a revised household roster in the American Community Survey (ACS) that directly counts same-sex and different-sex married and cohabiting couples. We rely on data from the ACS 1-year PUMS files from 2019 and 2021 to provide the most recent ACS estimates of changing numbers of individuals entering a same-sex marriage. We compare same-sex newlyweds to different-sex newlyweds based on the couples’ marital history, age, and education. Analyses are limited to householders and spouses of householders. Note that although the terms “sex” and “gender” are not interchangeable, because the ACS survey questionnaire uses the term “sex,” we have opted to do so as well. Check out the NCFMR profiles by topic “LGBTQ+ Relationships” for more resources on LGBTQ+ individuals and couples, Kamp Dush and Manning (2021) for marriage rates to same-sex couples and Julian et al. (2022) for changes in marriages to same-sex and different-sex couples during the pandemic.

Marriages in the Last Year
• In 2021 there were 60,046 marriages to same-sex couples representing 3.6% of all marriages.
• Nearly 4 out of 100 marriages in the U.S. in 2021 were to same-sex couples. A slightly greater share was to female couples (58%) than male couples (42%).

Figure 1. Sex Composition of Recently Married Couples, 2021

Figure 2. Change in the number of marriages in the last year by couple sex composition, 2019 & 2021

1 Among currently married couples, on average different sex couples have been married longer than couples of the same sex—25 years versus 10 years. In other words, a larger share of currently married couples of the same sex are in more recent marriages compared to couples of different sexes.
Marital History Among Couples Who Married in the Last Year

- About two-thirds of marriages in 2021 were to couples who were both entering marriage for the first time (Figure 3) (69% of sex-sex couples and 65% of different-sex couples).
- In 6% of same-sex couples married in 2021 both members of the couple had been previously married and in 25% only one member of the couple had been previously married.
- Nearly one-fifth (19%) of different-sex couples who married in 2021 included one person who had been previously married and in 16% both members of the couple had been previously married.

Age at Marriage Among Couples Who Married in the Last Year

- The age at first marriage continues to rise in the U.S. (Julian 2022). The age at marriage for same-sex couples is slightly older than for different-sex couples and there is a larger age gap between spouses (Westrick-Payne and Manning 2021).
- In two-fifths (40%) of marriages to same-sex couples the younger member of the couple was under age 30 and in about half (49%) of marriages to different-sex couples the younger of the newlyweds was under age 30.
- Same-sex couples who married in 2021 more often included someone over the age of 40 than different-sex couples (29% vs. 22%).

Educational Attainment Among Couples Who Married in the Last Year

- Same-sex couples who married in 2021 had higher levels of educational attainment than their different-sex counterparts.
- In over three out of five (63%) same-sex couples who married in 2021 one member of the couple had a college degree in contrast to 55% of different-sex couples who married in 2021.

Figure 3. First marriages and remarriages among couples who married in the last year, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both first marriage</th>
<th>First marriage for one</th>
<th>Remarriage for both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different sex</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same sex</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (IPUMS-USA)

Figure 4. First marriages and remarriages among couples who married in the last year, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different sex</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same sex</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (IPUMS-USA)

Figure 5. First marriages and remarriages among couples who married in the last year, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both H.S. or &lt;H.S.</th>
<th>One college degree</th>
<th>Both college degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different sex</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same sex</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (IPUMS-USA)
Data Source:

References:


Suggested Citation:

This project is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.