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NATIONAL

When it comes to relationships, Canadians add race to the mix

People of Japanese descent lead the trend of those forming cross-cultural unions

By JEFF GRAY

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When Rui Umezawa, 45, met his wife, Linda, at the University of Alberta in the early 1980s, the fact that he is Japanese and she isn't barely entered his mind.

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"It's something that I really didn't think about. . . . For me personally, I just met my wife and fell in love with her, and we got married and that was that," said Mr. Umezawa, who lives in Toronto and whose 2002 novel, *The Truth About Death and Dying*, draws on his experiences as a Japanese immigrant.

The cultural combination that is the Umezawa family is a recurring story across the country, and a Statistics Canada study on mixed marriage released yesterday reveals just how common it is.

More than 3 per cent of all existing Canadian marriages or common-law unions were mixed, mostly between a Caucasian and a member of a visible minority. And Japanese Canadians, although a small ethnic group, are the country's best mixers.

According to 2001 census data, of the approximately 25,100 married or common-law couples with at least one Japanese partner, 70 per cent were mixed unions. No other visible minority group comes close in proportional terms. Latin-Americans were second with 45-per-cent mixed marriages, and blacks were third with 43 per cent.

The statistics didn't surprise Mr. Umezawa, who said finding a couple in the Japanese community that is not mixed is the rarity.

The reasons Japanese Canadians tend to stand out on this measure of integration may be rooted in the experience of the Second World War, said James Heron, executive director of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto.

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"Because of the internment and the resettlement, this meant that Little Tokyo neighbourhoods, as you had with Chinatowns, ceased to exist. . . . Japanese Canadians had to be mixed in," said Mr. Heron, who lived in Japan for a decade and whose wife, Masayo, is Japanese.

Many who lived through the war decided to integrate aggressively, he said, trying to become, in effect, more Canadian than other Canadians.

The Statistics Canada study says there may be other factors, too, citing the "long Canadian heritage" of many Japanese Canadians. In 2001, 65 per cent of Japanese in the country were born here, and past research suggests that as immigrant groups become more comfortable with their adopted home, mixed marriages tend to rise.

Mr. Umezawa, whose physicist father moved the family to Alberta when he was 4, said he thinks Japanese culture also holds part of the answer.

While Japan has often seemed to the West to be a closed society, distrustful of foreigners, the culture has sponged up influences from afar, he said. Centuries ago, it was Chinese laws and Confucianism. In recent decades, it has been baseball and American pop culture, but always with a Japanese twist.

According to Statscan, there were 14.1 million Canadians in marriages or common-law unions in 2001, and 452,000 of those were in mixed unions. That number was up 35 per cent since 1991, compared to just a 10-per-cent rise in the number of couples over all.

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The federal number-crunching agency's report says increasing tolerance, social mobility and the sheer growth in the country's diversity are likely behind the increase. Four million people, or 13 per cent of the population, were classified as members of visible minorities in Canada in 2001. In 1981, the figure was 1.1 million.

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Most of the mixed pairings consisted of one visible-minority partner and one Caucasian partner. Only 0.4 per cent of mixed unions were between two members of different visible minority groups.

While the Japanese were proportionally the most mixed, in terms of absolute numbers, among visible minority groups, blacks were involved in the most mixed unions, 50,400.

Two of the largest minority groups in Canada, Chinese and South Asians, had lower rates of mixed marriages. Of Chinese couples in Canada, 16 per cent were mixed unions. Among South Asians, the rate was 13 per cent.

Mr. Umezawa, whose wife's parents hail from Newfoundland and Italy, says their very Canadian mixing of cultures has enriched the lives of their three children: "I add a little Japan in the mix, and my kids have relatives on three continents."

Mixed unions

According to the 2001 census, Japanese Canadians were the visible minority group most likely to pair up with someone from another ethnic group

.....Partners of

.....the same visible

Visible minority group and.....minority group,.....mixed

Number of total couples.....% of couples.....unions

Japanese: 25,100.....	30%.....	70%
Latin American: 57,800.....	55.....	45
Black: 117,800.....	57.....	43
Filipino: 78,700.....	67.....	33
Southeast Asian: 45,200.....	74.....	26
Arab/West Asian: 73,800.....	76.....	24
Korean: 24,800.....	82.....	18
Chinese: 265,600.....	84.....	16
South Asian: 232,000.....	87.....	13

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA

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