

Diversifying

Students of all races learn, listen and offer their opinions

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Interracial dating proved to be one of the hottest topics of discussion for high school students Thursday, Feb. 10, at a diversity conference at Wayne State University's Ohrbach Center.

The Student Diversity Conference featured a guest speaker and several workshops about cultural diversity. Students and faculty from Farmington, Harrison, North and Mercy high schools and Farmington Alternative Academy attended the conference.

One of the interracial dating workshops was filled well beyond capacity with students sitting on the floor and lining the walls. Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield stepped in at the beginning to ask that students be patient with each other in the crowded setting.

Students of all races voiced their opinions, sometimes sparking debate.

Andrea Coleman, a Mercy High student, said she has encountered hypocrisy from her parents about interracial dating.

"My mom and stepdad are against me dating African Americans," Coleman said, adding that her stepfather is Korean. He has told her, "I'd really prefer it if you don't date black boys."

Upon questioning him about why it was OK for her mother, who is white, to marry a Korean, she was told "that's different."

The class facilitators - Polly Bachrache, a counselor at Woodeland Elementary, and Pat Torres, a Spanish teacher at Harrison - both had their own interracial relationship stories to tell.

Bachrache, who is white, is married to a Lebanese native and bears her children as Muslims. Torres, the daughter of Mexican and Irish parents who eloped to escape their parents' scorn, is herself married to an African-American man.



Media: A session on "Diversity and the Media" drew the attention of (from left) Libby Grewal, Sana Mirza and Rob Gutman, all from Harrison High School.

Both situations have required compromise, the women said.

"It was more important to my husband for my children to be raised Muslim than it was for me to have them raised Christian," Bachrache said. They still celebrate Christian holidays, she added.

Ben Mandel, a North student, said a male friend, a Pakistani native, is dating a Taiwanese girl without his parents' blessing. Dating is forbidden in his culture.

"He hides (dating) from his parents," Mandel said.

Michael Griffin, a Farmington High junior who is African American, said a lot of old and hateful attitudes toward race-mixing linger.

"It wasn't too long ago that

black (men) were lynched for dating white girls," Griffin said, referring specifically to the Southern U.S. "I think we have a long way to go before we really unite."

Some students, however, took issue with Griffin's statement.

"We're never going to move

forward if we keep thinking like that," said Taylor Goad, a Harrison student, eliciting applause.

Though no students actually spoke out against interracial dating, some said it wasn't right for them.

"It sometimes just doesn't

work out," North student Lauren Zolnik said. Her grandparents, she said, would "probably shoot" her if she dated outside her race, which is white.

"I don't think (interracial dat-

ing) would be in my best interest," she said.

Other students did not seem as swayed by what their grandparents - or parents - think.

"I love Puerto Rican boys," said North student Rio Hill, who is African American.

"If you love that boy, you just

got to do what you can to get with him."

The guest speaker was Tou Ger Xiong, a native of Laos and a performer described as a "Hmong version of Eddie Murphy," Jim Carrey and Snoop Doggy Dogg.

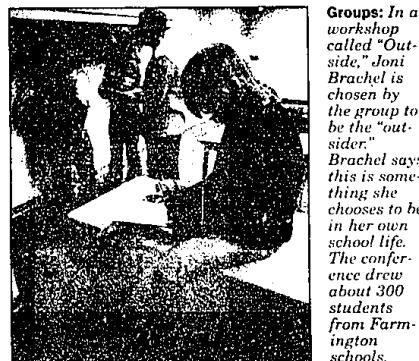
Panelists included Mylene Carr, Ed Hodges and Maroune Alameddine for the "Then and Now" workshop, Mark Hayes of WXYZ-TV, Jeanne Maliszewski, Farmington Observer communi-



Popular topic: Interracial dating was the subject of a workshop that drew a capacity crowd.

ty editor and Hugh McDiarmid of the Free Press for the "Diversity and the Media" workshop.

Also on hand was Tou Ger Xiong in "More Time to Talk"; various Farmington and Farmington Hills police officers for "The Police and You"; Marge Hainsworth and several Harrison students for "Being New"; and Rabbi Danny Nevin, the Rev. Rod Reinhart and Deacon Mark Springer for "How Do You Worship?"



Groups: In a workshop called "Outside," Joni Brachet is chosen by the group to be the "outsider." Brachet says this is something she chooses to be in her own school life. The conference drew about 300 students from Farmington schools.

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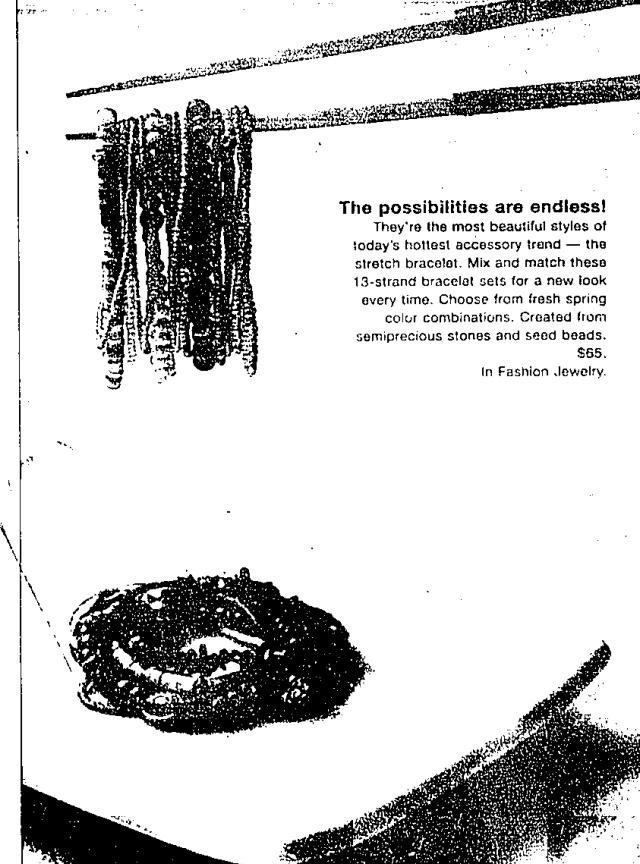
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