

## DATING

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women) don't go out with (black men) because they truly like them. The only reason some white women go out with black men is because of curiosity."

The pressure from family, friends and "people staring at you just walkin' down the street," Davis said, can be enough to destroy an interracial relationship if it is not based on genuine feelings.

"It sometimes feels like the whole world is coming down at you," Davis said.

Although Davis and his girlfriend rarely turn heads while walking down the street here at the University, Myrick does recall being harassed several times for her relationship with Davis.

"Cleo and I were walking along the street from Powell's Bookstore (in Portland). Someone tried to spit on me from a car that was driving by," Myrick said. Myrick, a senior at Cleveland High School in Portland, has also been taunted by some of

her black classmates for dating Davis.

Because of these separate incidents, Davis believes it takes a stronger person to be in an interracial relationship.

"Mindy has to compromise more," he said. "She has to understand more because she's trying to learn about black culture."

Davis also believes that Myrick's efforts at trying to understand black culture has helped the relationship prosper.

Davis theorizes that if he were white and Myrick were black, societal opposition to his relationship would be even greater.

"I would get more crap. I think whites would be a lot more opposed to a white man dating a black woman," he said. Because white men are normally not victims of racism, "if I were a white man, it would be a big change because it would be the first time I'd be discriminated against" for going out with a black woman, Davis said.

Yet Bill Jennings' relationship with a Vietnamese woman clashes with Davis' belief that it would

be worse for a white man to go out with a person of color than a minority going out with a Caucasian woman.

Jennings is white, and his experiences with an Asian girlfriend suggest that his interracial relationship was not as taboo as Davis'.

"We occasionally got stares from older Americans, but we were never harassed while we were in Eugene," he said.

Jennings doesn't know whether he would be harassed outside of Eugene because he and his girlfriend never left the city together. Jennings and his girlfriend dated for about six months, but had to break it off because she is studying in France this year.

Jennings is interested in Asian cultures; he wants to someday teach English in Japan, then come back to the United States and teach Japanese. Like Davis, Jennings has learned much by being in an interracial relationship.

"I learned a lot about Asian culture, different customs, and how we were brought up differently. I saw a lot of respect for elders and superiors. That respect

really lacks in American society," he said.

Mitchell Tan and Susanne Steffens have faced the same types of pressures as Davis and Myrick — but with a different twist. Tan and Steffens are both international students studying here in the United States. Tan is from Singapore, and Steffens is from Norway.

Being two foreigners in the United States seems to have been the only bond the two shared when they began seeing each other last June. Steffens says that, at first, she knew nothing about Tan's culture or language.

Now, Tan teaches Steffens the Chinese language, which is made up of more than one dialect. Learning the language helps Steffens learn about Tan's culture.

From language to culture to food, Tan and Steffens have had to compromise. "Mitchell eats very Chinese," Steffens remarked.

"But I am adjusting to her style — eating bland," Tan jokingly responded. "Susanne's not used to spicy food. I'm slowly exposing her to Chinese food."

Tan and Steffens' ability to

compromise, communicate and their sheer will to make it work has helped them overcome the occasional stares trained at them while in Eugene, peer skepticism toward their relationship, and familial opposition.

"My mom doesn't like it. She felt really insecure of having to deal with someone from a different culture. For the older generation, they still hold old stereotypes of blacks, whites and other Asians," Tan said.

Tan also said there are plenty of cross-cultural marriages between Indians, Chinese and the few whites who live in Singapore.

"Many of these (Asian-Asian marriages) are also opposed, but not as opposed as Asian-white marriages," he said. "Because Asians have the same color, so it wouldn't be minded as much. Language is the only barrier between two different Asian groups."

Tan has also had to deal with friends who doubt whether he is going out with Steffens for the right reasons.

"Some of them believe that I'm only going out with her because it's some sort of status symbol to be with a white woman," Tan said.

Steffens has also had to contend with the stereotypes that her family and friends hold of Tan and his culture.

"My father wants me to get married to a European. However, my mother is more liberal about it," Steffens said.

Tan has never met Steffens' parents, but has occasionally spoken to her father when he's called from Norway.

"Both my parents think it won't last," said Steffens, who plans to move to Singapore with Tan after graduation. "They think that Singapore is very backward. They also believe that women are put down there, so I won't be able to find a good job. It's just ignorance about his country."

But the strongest reaction Steffens received was from her friends in Oslo.

"I feel like my friends looked at me differently," she said. "They asked me, 'How can you go out with a Chinese?' They were surprised because growing up, we always had the same tastes in boys. They couldn't imagine themselves going out with a Chinese person, so how could I?"

And what would happen if Tan were to visit Norway, as he plans to after graduation?

"I think my friends and family would be very reserved," Steffens said. "It would be very different for them because there are none or very few Chinese (in Norway). They wouldn't be racist — just ignorant."

The more family and friends oppose or doubt Tan and Steffens' relationship, the closer the two have become. Because they are both in a foreign country, there are times when they literally have only each other.

"The fact we're in a foreign country has been very positive," Steffens said. "It's something that links us. We're both very far away from home, and sometimes we miss home. Mitch understands. An American wouldn't."

"It's different being in a cross-cultural relationship, but it keeps it interesting. We're similar in that we both like challenges. We are very optimistic about things, and we are working hard to make it work," she said.

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