

## Is love colour blind? Mixed race couples tackle challenges

**Channel NewsAsia**, 25 August 2016

SINGAPORE: Love may be colour-blind for the two people in a relationship - but it's often not the case for their families or others in society.

Norsham Husaini and Anne Chua dated for seven years before telling their parents of their wedding plans. Norsham, 41, recalls: "It was actually quite nerve-wrecking breaking the news to my mum that I was going to marry this Chinese girl."

Even though the couple now have three children, Anne, 37, said: "It has been difficult because my dad is still not really part of the picture. He's still not comfortable with being part of my family."

About one in five, or 21.5 per cent, of all marriages in 2015 involved couples of different races. That's a significant increase from 14.9 per cent in 2005.

A recent survey showed, however, that acceptance of such marriages remains mixed.

Fewer than one in four Chinese respondents were accepting of a non-Chinese marrying into the family. And fewer than half of Indian respondents indicated acceptance of a non-Indian, according to the survey by Channel NewsAsia in partnership with the Institute of Policy Studies.

In a special four-part series that premieres Friday (Aug 26) on MediaCorp Channel 5, *On The Red Dot* profiles three mixed-race couples and the ups and downs of their relationships – from their first meeting, to gaining family acceptance, to bringing up children in a sometimes complicated cultural, linguistic and religious heritage.

Indian Catholic Martin Silva, 41, proposed to Esther Low, 40, a Chinese Buddhist, after dating for three years. They are now planning for their wedding in 2017.

But there have been cultural conundrums to deal with – ranging from deciding on a date that did not clash with the Chinese Seventh Month or the Christian time of Lent, to the wedding customs.

While they have agreed on a church wedding, said Martin: "We haven't decided on this gate crashing thing, this Chinese custom - the groom goes over and picks the wife up. I've believed all these years that seeing the bride before getting to church is like bad luck. So that is what we both are discussing. She really, really wants it."

Norsham and Anne, now married for eight years, have to decide how their children's identities should evolve in a mixed race marriage. As it is, choosing a second language for their eldest child, Aleisha, as she enrolls in primary school next year is already fraught with controversy.

The couple have decided on Malay. But, Anne said: “We have a lot of concerned friends and family asking why we were not letting them learn Chinese as a second language because we are doing them a disservice and putting them at a disadvantage.”

The oldest couple of the three couples, Veronica Karl and Simon Lim, have been married for 35 years. She is Eurasian, while he was raised with a strict Peranakan upbringing.

After all these years, they seem to have found middle ground. Said Veronica: “I shouldn’t be saying, ‘Simon, you have to do it my way, this is how we Eurasians do it’, because he has his own traditions ... I’ve come to accept it and I am happy; I’ve learnt so much from his family.”

Added Simon: “You cannot change your race... You just follow your style but try to adapt, so that both parties are happy.”

Series producer Naleeza Ebrahim said: “Any marriage is complicated enough, but a mixed marriage simply ups the ante.”

Deputy chief editor Susanna Kulatissa said the producers were “struck by the honesty and earnestness with which each couple shared their story”.

“What became starkly clear to us by the end of the series was that despite the hurdles, they still found ways to bridge their cultural gaps – reminding each of us that we are indeed more similar than we are different,” she added.