

'Clash couples' earn marital compatibility daily

By Ana Rodriguez-Soto
NC News Service

Meet Peggy and Raul, a modern Romeo and Juliet, in the star-crossed sense. They're in their 20s, madly in love and planning to get married, but they haven't looked beyond the romance of the wedding day.

The "macho" charm that now attracts Peggy to Raul may poison their relationship later, when she discovers his view of marriage: the woman cooks and keeps house and takes orders from the man, who makes all the financial decisions alone.

A similarly shocking discovery awaits Raul, for Peggy's streak of independence means that she will demand equal rights as a wife and probably insist on working outside the home.

How can they live "happily ever after?"

By compromising, says Dr. Henry McGinnis. In every marriage "sometimes you make trade-offs and you acknowledge

the trade-offs," he advises. Compromising demands that both partners be mature and good at communicating.

Peggy and Raul are McGinnis' favorite "clash" couple. The veteran marriage and family therapist, who has taught more than 100 marriage preparation courses for the Archdiocese of Miami, uses the fictional Peggy and Raul to make a point about compatibility in marriage: it doesn't come magically with the sacramental blessing. Compatibility is earned, day by day.

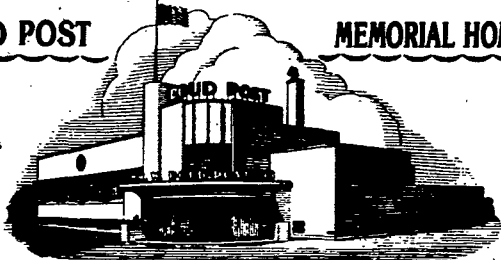
"Marriage is a never-ending mixture of compromises," he says. "You can't always do what you want."

Personality clashes are not limited to couples whose cultural backgrounds are as diverse as Peggy's and Raul's. She is Irish and he is Hispanic. In today's fast-moving society, few people marry the hometown sweetheart they grew up with. Even if they do, chances are that time spent away at



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college or a stint in the military may change one of them forever.

Marital role expectations are imprinted in the home, McGinnis says. But it is possible for couples to work out such expectations. The key is "to be as mature as possible and flexible," McGinnis says. "Work on common goals. Build on the commonalities, with the common denominator of communication. You and I can agree to disagree, and that doesn't destroy the relationship."

McGinnis points out that lack of communication is at the root of most marriage problems.

"It's a skill that really has to be learned and worked on," he says. He tells couples they shouldn't wait until they're married to begin talking seriously about their future together and what each expects from marriage, including goals and plans, dreams, views on life, children, religion and even politics.

The marriage preparation period (between four and six months) established by most U.S. dioceses and such programs as Pre-

Cana and Engaged Encounter are excellent opportunities to stimulate couples "to think, reflect and discuss," McGinnis says.

Such programs help couples "think of marriage not as a fantasy but as a reality," he adds, pointing out that trouble is sure to follow when one partner expects the other to change after the wedding day. "They're going to change — for the worse."

After the wedding day, the communication skills learned before must be practiced constantly. As long as something is "defined and agreed upon, there's no problem," McGinnis says.

Maturity is another trait that all couples must bring to marriage.

McGinnis defines maturity as a combination of characteristics, chief among them "the capacity to manage one's own affairs reasonably well" and "the capacity to delay gratification."

Mature people also "recognize that there have to be concessions (in marriage). You don't always have to feel the way I feel," McGinnis says.

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