

Are “gay” divorcees really feeling gay? A Psychotherapist Writes About Same-Sex Clients’ Psychological Reaction to Divorce

By Jassy Timberlake, M.Ed., LMFT

Same-sex couples have been dealing with relationship break-ups in therapy for many years. A new wrinkle for some of these break-ups is the inclusion of legal marriage and legal divorce. While 50% of heterosexual marriages end in divorce, there are particular issues to same-sex divorce that psychotherapists and other divorce professionals must understand. These differences include same-sex couples’ lack of familiarity with the legalities of divorce, the homophobic culture that provides varying degrees of support for the marriage or understanding of the factors existing in same-sex divorce, along with added pressure from both outside and inside the LGBT community.

The Massachusetts high court ruling in November 2003, which allowed same-sex couples to marry beginning in May of 2004, was a landmark decision that took the GLBT community by surprise. Despite all their work fighting for civil rights, few GLBT activists expected the expansion of our civil rights to include legal marriage. The passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996 had explicitly defined marriage as a union of one man and one woman for the purposes of federal law. At the time, the passage of that act felt for many in our community like large, rusty nails in the collective GLBT civil rights coffin.

The idea of having our relationships sanctioned by law was so unexpected, such a never-in-our-lifetime-feeling, that many people leapt to make their relationships legal, in order to take advantage of what they feared would be their only chance to protect their families. Some couples have reported feeling that, thrust into getting married to protect what limited benefits they were being offered, they didn’t really understand the long-term ramifications of being legally married. Some have even told of being audited because their taxes were not understood by the IRS. Other couples faced loss of their health benefits after passage of the bill, and felt they had no choice but to marry.

Same-sex couples aren’t the only ones unfamiliar with their new status. Many lawyers in Boston are refusing to take on same-sex divorce cases because the law is so untested and is even more problematic because same-sex marriages are not federally recognized. From a legal standpoint, this makes our divorces even messier than those of heterosexual couples. As Joyce Kauffman, a Boston-area lawyer, has pointed out, divorce is one of the benefits of marriage. On top of the complex legalities of same-sex divorce,

few of us have had time to catch up with the steep and complex emotional learning curve of such a benefit.

Divorcing same-sex clients often feel like they are walking on the crunching egg-shells of a legal system unprepared for same-sex marriage, let alone same-sex divorce. Kali Munro, a psychotherapist in private practice in Canada says, “I find that heterosexual couples are more likely to have known other people who have divorced, what their rights were, how finances were handled, what to do, etc., whereas lesbian and gay couples are new to the legal and financial implications of marriage and don’t always know their options. I’ve heard some lesbian couples say that they can’t divorce, despite their great unhappiness, because their finances are shared and they don’t see a way out of it. This adds even more strain to an already strained relationship.”

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Making the decision to end a relationship is a difficult and painful one, a decision that few couples make lightly regardless of sexual orientation. Research has shown that most divorcing couples face a complex emotional salad of confusion, shame, embarrassment, uncertainty, sadness and a profound feeling of personal failure. Bear in mind that this research was carried out using divorcing heterosexual couples as the basis for the research, against the backdrop of a culture and society that promotes, supports and protects their marriages. The same situation does not pertain for same-sex couples whose relationships may have been vilified and discounted by homophobic opposition. Same-sex clients contemplating divorce, in turning to their therapists for emotional support and guidance, may find clinicians who are unaware of the particular complexities of same-sex divorce, including issues that may be concealed beneath layers of shame, humiliation, and internalized homophobia.

Same-sex relationships suffer from bad press and a host of inaccurate, homophobic myths. We have been told that our relationships aren’t “real”, that they don’t last, and have even been

equated with bestiality (Thank you, Huckabee!) Joe Kort, psychotherapist and author, says that in his clinical practice he has found that same-sex clients who are in the process of divorcing “are afraid to tell family and friends for similar reasons that heterosexual couples have but, in addition, their divorce is like confirmation that heterosexism is correct and that gay relationships are doomed to fail.” None of us wants to provide fodder to anti-same-sex marriage individuals and right-wing organizations who will point to divorcing same-sex couples as evidence that we aren’t “real” couples. But, as Kali Munro points out, “How odd that anyone would even try to point to divorce in the lesbian and gay community as proof that those marriages were never ‘real’ when we all know about the divorce statistics in the heterosexual community!”

Same-sex couples with children choose to marry for some of the same reasons as heterosexual couples. Additionally, they want to give as much protection to their children and their own vulnerable relationship as possible by taking advantage of their ability to legally marry in Massachusetts. I spoke recently with a lesbian mother who is going through a divorce and agreed to talk with me on condition that she remains anonymous. She said that she and her partner had been together for many years before they married and her experience in her family of origin was, “You feel like an outsider when you’re not married.” For this lesbian mother, having children legitimized her marriage, because her parents saw themselves as having a formal role, that of grandparents.

Regrettably, not all same-sex couples are so lucky. For some couples, some of the emotional issues that arise from dealing with a homophobic culture are further amplified by marriage and then heightened further by a subsequent divorce. A couple who saw me for therapy told me that both their families had consistently treated their fifteen-year relationship as completely unimportant and invalid, even after their legal marriage, and, now, with their impending divorce, as if that too was “invisible.” One of the partners commented that it was clear to her that her parents hadn’t recognized either her marriage or her divorce as important as they did that of one of her siblings, despite the fact that my client’s grief at the ending of her relationship was as profound as anyone experiencing the end of a marriage. While her sibling had been showered with financial and emotional support, she said her parents

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refused to bring up the subject of their divorce and had even changed the topic of conversation on several occasions. Some of the work we did in therapy involved validating for this couple that their deeply-felt feelings of sadness, loss, fear and humiliation were real, and nothing to gloss over, despite their families' insistence on treating them disrespectfully and not hiding their disapproval and judgment of them and their relationship. It's not easy work.

Many divorcing same-sex couples also report feeling pressure from within the GLBT community. The additional burden of feeling like a poster child for same-sex marriage creates an added and sometimes overwhelming feeling of pressure. These couples are struggling with feeling as if they let down their community. Joe Winn, LICSW, a psychotherapist in private practice in Arlington, Massachusetts, reports that among clients going through same-sex divorce he has noticed clients “who refuse to address the intensity of their divorce - minimizing their feelings, minimizing their loss and mourning - which I have been attributing to trying to avoid the shame and sense of failure that comes with loss.” Winn reports that he has seen in some of his clients a re-emergence of internalized homophobia and a developmental regression of their les-

bian or gay identity. Other therapists report clients talking about their deep feelings of embarrassment and humiliation and, in some cases, confessing that they dread telling their heterosexual friends and relatives even more than same-sex friends. It's not only the homophobic response from families of origin and society that same-sex couples fear. As Joe Kort remarks, “Others have been judged negatively by their friends who tell them they should not have gotten tangled up with a legal system to begin with, something that straight couples would not necessarily say to one another about marriage.”

Elizabeth Zelvin, psychotherapist and mystery author, points out that therapists need to be mindful not only of the ways in which same-sex couples are the same or different, but the fact that some same-sex clients may be less willing to reveal relationship issues in therapy. The same issues that are at play in larger society for divorcing same-sex couples may also play out in their relationship with their therapist. For example, if the therapist is heterosexual, the client may be concerned about misunderstanding or homophobia from the therapist. If the therapist is lesbian or gay, the same issue of “letting down our team”

may surface for the client. Feelings of shame about divorce may make them less likely to talk about their relationship issues.

Therapists have been dealing with relationship break-ups forever. Now, they must deal with the ramifications of same-sex legal marriage and legal divorce. In order to provide useful support to their clients, psychotherapists and other divorce professionals must recognize the particular issues inherent in same-sex divorce, including lack of familiarity with the legalities of divorce, the homophobic culture that provides varying degrees of support for the marriage or support, and pressure from inside and outside the LGBT community. By being mindful of and addressing the complex interplay of these legal, emotional and social issues, psychotherapists and other divorce professionals will be able to assist same-sex couples who find themselves in this previously uncharted territory.

Jassy Timberlake is a sex therapist and licensed marriage and family therapist, with clinical practices in Watertown and Northampton, Massachusetts. She also has an online therapy practice at www.JassyTimberlake.com, working primarily with the GLBT population and is a member of the Divorce Center.

“Everything You Want to Know About Divorce in Massachusetts “

Our public education series entitled, “Everything You Want to Know About Divorce in Massachusetts and Now You Can Ask” will be held on Thursday evenings beginning March 6th from 7—9 PM at 160 Gould St., Needham. The series is intended for those contemplating or going through a separation or divorce. Various attorneys, psychotherapists, mediators, career counselors and financial experts will present the various topics. The schedule is as follows:

March 6— “What is the process and where do I start?” This session provides valuable, practical information about the divorce process and its alternatives (litigation vs. mediation/arbitration vs. collaboration), new guidelines for mortgage financing that could limit options for the housing issue, and how to choose the right attorney.

March 13— “What are my financial issues?” This session delivers tips about mandatory financial disclosures, court rules, the ‘discovery’ process, the form and importance of motions for temporary orders.

March 20— “What about my children?” This session offers valuable information on the different types of custody arrangements available to divorced parents. It will also explain the roles of a GAL and a Parent Coordinator as well as give

information on relocation, working out a parenting plan, and crafting custodial orders.

March 27— “Where do I go from here?” This session focuses on delivering strategies for coping with divorce stress and pressure which can be brought on by managing changes in your daily life, helping the children to adjust, coping with holidays and vacations as well as overall schedule changes.

A question and answer period will be held after each session.

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MARRIAGE, CIVIL UNION, AND DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP –

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

By Joyce Kauffman, Esquire

In December of 2003, the Supreme Judicial Court determined that same-sex couples were entitled to the benefits of marriage under the Massachusetts constitution. *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, 440 Mass. 309 (2003). An avalanche of change with respect to the legal recognition of same-sex relationships in the United States, begun more than a decade before when the Hawaii case of *Baehr vs. Miike* was initially filed, continues. In the 1990's, the Hawaiian court seemed poised to grant marriage rights to same-sex couples until the legislature intervened by enacting a Defense of Marriage law defining marriage as between one man and one woman. The Hawaiian legislature went on to enact the Hawaii Reciprocal Beneficiaries law in July 8, 1997. The law provides *limited* state rights to same-sex couples and "represents a commitment to provide substantially similar government rights to those couples who are barred by law from marriage." Since then, several jurisdictions have enacted some kind of protective status for same-sex couples, some more that are more "substantially similar" to marriage and some that are less. It all depends on where you live.

The Federal Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 declares that marriage is between one man and one woman and no state need recognize the union of a same-sex couple; this, of course, effectively undercuts the full faith and credit provisions of the US Constitution with respect to the recognition of same-sex relationships. As a result, couples married in Massachusetts and couples who have entered into Domestic Partnerships or Civil Unions where available, have access to none of the more than 1,100 federal rights and benefits available to heterosexual married couples. In the last several years, 45 jurisdictions (44 states and the District of Columbia) have similarly enacted Defense of Marriage Acts confirming that none of those jurisdictions intends to recognize same-sex marriages or any relationship between same-sex couples.

While Massachusetts remains the only state to grant marriage rights, there are six other states that have enacted relationship recognition for same-sex couples that is

"substantially similar" to marriage.¹ Couples who do not reside in Massachusetts may not marry in Massachusetts if their state of residency does not recognize same-sex marriages. Thus far, Rhode Island residents are the only ones who can take advantage of marriage in Massachusetts (but note that the RI Supreme Court has recently ruled that same-sex married RI residents cannot get divorced in RI).

VERMONT

In 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ordered its state legislature to come up with a system providing same-sex couples with traditional marriage benefits and protections. (*Baker v. State*, 744 A.2d 864 (Vt. 1999).) The Vermont legislature subsequently passed the Vermont Civil Union law, which went into effect on July 1, 2000. While this law does not legalize same-sex marriages, it does provide gay and lesbian couples living in Vermont with many of the same advantages, including:

- use of family laws such as annulment, divorce, child custody, child support, alimony, domestic violence, adoption, and property division
- the right to sue for wrongful death, loss of consortium, and any other tort or law related to spousal relationships
- medical rights such as hospital visitation, notification, and durable power of attorney
- family leave benefits
- joint state tax filing, and
- property inheritance without a will

There is no residency requirement for entering into a civil union in Vermont.

NEW JERSEY

In 2004, New Jersey passed a *Domestic Partnership* law. Same-sex couples (who share a common residence and are over the age of 18) and opposite-sex couples where one partner is 62 or older may register as domestic

partners. All couples must demonstrate financial interdependence (as shown by a joint mortgage, lease, checking account, or the like). The New Jersey law is close to creating parity with marriage, but has some significant differences in that the law, for example, *does not provide* for inheritance rights or the right to petition for spousal support if the relationship ends and *does not provide* any automatic parental rights -- second parents will still have to petition for adoption (which is available in New Jersey). The law does create equality with married couples in insurance coverage and medical decision making and the ability to file joint state tax returns (though not federal, because of the federal Defense of Marriage Act). However, domestic partners cannot claim a right to family entitlements in public benefit programs. While the law provides for dissolution similar to divorce, the courts do not have power over equitable distribution of assets. New Jersey will recognize the civil unions or domestic partnerships of couples from other states.

CALIFORNIA

In 2005, California passed AB 205, granting *Domestic Partnership* (and superseding a previously-enacted domestic partnership registry) to same-sex couples, essentially granting all the rights of marriage to same-sex couples, but not marriage per se. Opposite sex couples may enter into a domestic partnership if one of the parties is over the age of 62. The primary difference between domestic partnership and marriage in California is the manner in which couples register for domestic partnership and dissolve a domestic partnership. In addition, domestic partners do not have the protection of any statute or constitutional provision passed by citizen initiative. One interesting – and extremely helpful – provision of the California law is that domestic partners may opt for continuing jurisdiction to California to dissolve their domestic partnership even if they never lived or no longer live in California. As will be discussed below, the ability to dissolve a partnership has become a significant issue for same-sex couples. There is no residency require-

¹Four other jurisdictions (Washington, Maine, District of Columbia, and Hawaii) have created "domestic partner registries" which provide limited protections to same-sex couples and do not come close to approximating marriage.

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ment for entering a Domestic Partnership in California. Both parties must be over the age of 18.

CONNECTICUT

Also in 2005, the state of Connecticut enacted a *Civil Union* law – the first time a legislature did so without pressure from the Courts. Civil Unions in Connecticut essentially provide all the protections, benefits, and responsibilities of marriage to same-sex couples. There are some interesting differences, however, which include the following: an official has the right *not* to officiate at a civil union (not available to public officials with respect to marriage, of course) and although 16- and 17-year olds are, under some circumstances, allowed to marry in Connecticut, an individual must be 18 years old or older to enter into a Civil Union. There is no residency requirement for entering into a civil union in Connecticut.

OREGON

In 2007, the Oregon legislatures enacted a *Domestic Partnership* law. The Oregon law (when it goes into effect) is similar to the California law in that it grants the same protections, benefits, and responsibilities as marriage. At least one member of the couple must be a resident of Oregon and both parties must be over the age of 18 in order to enter into a Domestic Partnership. Unfortunately, in late December, a federal judge issued an injunction preventing the Oregon law from taking effect because of an alleged problem with the verification process concerning a referendum effort to put the issue on the November 2008 ballot.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Effective January 1, 2008, New Hampshire allows for Civil Unions which, just as in Vermont, provide same-sex couples with equivalent rights to married heterosexual couples. Unlike other jurisdictions, however, New Hampshire's civil union law includes a provision that allows for the recognition of civil unions entered into by couples outside of New Hampshire. Couples who move to New Hampshire and have previously entered into a civil union in another state or a marriage in Massachusetts will be seen as having a valid civil union in New Hampshire. There is no residency requirement for entering into a civil union in New Hampshire.

THE INABILITY TO DIVORCE

One of the most significant problems faced by same-sex couples is the inability to dissolve a civil union or domestic partnership or to divorce, if they have left the state where they entered into the legal relationship. The Rhode Island court recently ruled that RI will not recognize a Massachusetts marriage for the purpose of same-sex divorce. Since same-sex marriage is not recognized in the majority of jurisdictions, it is unlikely that a couple married in Massachusetts will be

The only way same-sex couples will have true equality under the law is when our relationships are recognized by all the states and by the Federal Government.

able to divorce outside of Massachusetts. To the best of this author's knowledge, California is the only state that retains jurisdiction to dissolve a domestic partnership when the parties no longer reside in California. The Pandora's Box of problems this creates is certain to be a significant challenge to these couples and to the courts down the road. For example, all of the states that provide legal protections require that neither party be in another domestic partnership or civil union prior to entering into that legal relationship. If someone is unable to dissolve the previous relationship, they will not be able to enter into a new legal relationship.

One other example serves to illustrate some of the other issues that may arise: a couple married in Massachusetts, moves to Ohio and then breaks up. They cannot get divorced, but they go their separate ways. Ultimately, one of them moves back to Massachusetts, where they are *still* married. Even though she can file for divorce after residing in Massachusetts for a year, she dies before that year is up. Who has authority over burial? Does the spouse have a claim to her estate in Massachusetts?

Legal experts around the country are grappling with these questions; most agree that the only real solution is for the legal relationships of same-sex couples to be recognized everywhere, including by the federal government.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The only way same-sex couples will have true equality under the law is when our relationships are recognized by all the states and by the Federal Government. "Marriages" that enjoy full faith and credit by all other jurisdictions are the only sure path to that recognition. The essence of the difference between Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships, on the one hand, and Marriage, on the other hand is this: first, only marriage confers over 1,100 federal rights and benefits, along with the hundreds of state rights and benefits, and second, it is only through marriage that same-sex couples can hope to obtain full equality. Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships are certainly a step in the right direction but effectively create a "separate but equal" situation, essentially making same-sex couples second class citizens. Among the Federal benefits *unavailable* to same-sex married couples are protections under the Family Medical Leave Act; family and death benefits through social security and pension plans (most of which provide benefits only to legal spouses); the ability to have foreign spouses immigrate to the U.S.; worker's compensation surviving spouse protections; and numerous tax benefits, including tax breaks for couples raising children. And do not forget, the vast majority of states provide *no legal protections* to same sex-couples and families headed by those couples. Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, the organization which brought the *Goodridge* case to the Court, states that: Marriage is a unique legal status conferred by and recognized by governments the world over. It brings with it a host of reciprocal obligations, rights, and protections. Yet it is more than the sum of its legal parts. It is also a cultural institution. The word itself is a side. It fundamental protection, conveying clearly that you and your life partner love each other, are united and belong by each other's side. It represents the ultimate expression of love and commitment between two people and everyone understands that. No other word has that power, and no other word can provide that protection.

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<http://www.glad.org/rights/OP7-marriagevcu.shtml> (this article on the GLAD website provides an in-depth analysis of the differences between marriage and civil unions/domestic partnerships).

About the author

Joyce Kauffman, a 1992 graduate of Northeastern University Law School, and specializes in family law, co-parent adoption, and mediation, with an emphasis on legal issues affecting lesbian and gay families. She has handled several same-sex divorces since the Goodridge decision. Her efforts to provide protections to gay and lesbian families include obtaining three-parent

adoptions for several families and obtaining a court order mandating that two women be placed on their son's birth certificate at birth where one of the woman gave birth to the other woman's biological child through IVF. Attorney Kauffman was on brief in the historic co-parent adoption case that established the right of unmarried cohabitants to jointly adopt in Massachusetts and, since then, has represented hundreds of lesbian and gay families in their quest to legalize their relationships with their children. She has written numerous articles on these issues and is a frequent speaker at seminars, conferences, and in community settings on issues of importance to lesbian and gay parents, co-parent adoption, and family law, and more recently, on how same-sex mar-

riage will impact the lesbian and gay community. Attorney Kauffman is a past co-chair of the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Bar Association (MLGBA) and past chair of the MLGBA's Family Law Section.



Same-Sex Couples: The Need for Premarital Agreements

By Carol Lynn May, Esquire

Since May 18, 2004, six months after it was decided by the Supreme Judicial Court, the landmark case of *Goodridge* has legalized same-sex marriages in Massachusetts. Several other states have passed legislation or otherwise recognized some form of civil unions or domestic partnerships, most recently New Hampshire, and Oregon, whose law passed in 2007 allowing domestic partnerships took effect on February 1, 2008 when a federal court challenge to the Oregon law was denied. Massachusetts, however, continues to remain the only state that allows for same-sex marriages.

The decision to marry can be a difficult one, but especially for same-sex couples where many legal issues are present, that are not faced by heterosexual couples who legally marry.

Same-sex couples marrying in Massachusetts should strongly consider entering into premarital agreements beforehand (or postmarital agreements if they have already married and do not have a premarital agreement). Premarital agreements have been recognized in Massachusetts since the *Osborne* case was decided in 1974. Premarital agreements can be recognized and enforced if there is full and fair financial disclosure and the agreement is considered fair and reasonable and not unconscionable. In premarital agreements, couples can negotiate and agree to what will happen to their property and assets and other

financial matters (exclusive of child support) in the event of a divorce. Premarital agreements can also contain provisions regarding inheritance.

For couples who are legally married and remain here in Massachusetts, the legal landscape is not a model of clarity. As a consequence of the federal DOMA (the so-called Defense of Marriage Act), a legally married same-sex couple in Massachusetts is not entitled to numerous benefits that a married heterosexual couple can receive, including eligibility to receive social security benefits through their spouse. Tax-wise, the couples are, also, treated very differently. The same-sex couple is not able to file joint federal income tax returns, while transfers between same-sex spouses, which are permitted to be accomplished as tax-free exchanges between heterosexual couples in a divorce, cannot be structured in the same way in the dissolution of a same-sex marriage and are subject to possible gift tax ramifications. Nor can alimony be awarded to allow the payor spouse to deduct support payments for tax purposes in a dissolution of a same-sex marriage, since alimony payments are governed by federal tax law. Retirement benefits, which can be transferred tax-free in accordance with federal law (ERISA), cannot be so transferred in a divorce involving a same-sex couple. Nor can the surviving spouse in a same-sex marriage receive retirement benefits governed by ERISA on a tax-deferred

basis, unlike a surviving spouse in a heterosexual marriage, again due to the federal DOMA. Finally, it is not clear whether a Probate Court in Massachusetts divorcing a same-sex couple would give consideration to the length of time the couple resided together prior to the date of their marriage ceremony. Same-sex couples can address in a premarital agreement how to provide for a fair resolution of their financial issues in the event of a divorce or the death of either party in the context of this complicated legal landscape.

The difficulties faced by a same-sex couple legally married in Massachusetts who remain in Massachusetts are surpassed by those encountered by a same-sex couple legally married here, who moves to another jurisdiction, particularly any of the vast majority of states (37 as of 2004), which have passed their own version of DOMA. The federal DOMA allows states not to give full faith and credit to other states' decisions in this regard. A same-sex Massachusetts married couple relocating to another state would have no legal status, with the exception of New Hampshire and the possible exception of New York as noted above.

This can lead to a legal quagmire for a same-sex couple legally wed in Massachusetts who moves from this state. *Continued on page 8*

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The couple will be in a new jurisdiction where their marriage will not be recognized (with the possible exception of New York, or in New Hampshire where it will be converted to a domestic partnership, as noted above). On the other hand, if the marriage does not work out, the couple will most likely not be able to get divorced in another state. (See *Chambers v. Ormiston*, where the Rhode Island Supreme Court held on December 7, 2007, that the Family Court of Rhode Island could not entertain a divorce petition to dissolve the marriage between two individuals of the same sex who were married in Massachusetts).

Legal problems can also ensue if one of the parties stays in the new state, and the other moves back to Massachusetts, but there is never a legal divorce. The out-of-state party may claim legal rights here in

Massachusetts as a result of the marriage, and issues, including related to inheritance can arise at a later date.

A premarital agreement will help a same-sex couple to maintain some degree of control and predictability over how their assets and estates will be handled in the event the marriage is dissolved by divorce or the death of either party. Given all the uncertainties and complexities in the legal landscape faced by a same-sex couple getting married in Massachusetts, negotiating and entering into a premarital agreement should be strongly considered.



About the author....

Carol Lynn May is an attorney whose office is in Wayland. She also meets clients by appointment in Worcester. Her law practice concentrates in family law (premarital, postmarital, and living together agreements; divorce; separation; custody and visitation; adoption; and guardianships), mediation; and collaborative law. She has served two years as Co-President of the Divorce Center. She is a past president of the Massachusetts Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, and is a member of the Family Law Sections of the American Bar Association, Massachusetts Bar Association, and the Boston Bar Association, and is a member of the Worcester County Bar Association and the South Middlesex Bar Association.