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What I Did for Love, or Benefits, or...: Same-Sex Marriage in Massachusetts

Same-Sex Marriage
Study Group

(2005) Paper No. 422

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What I Did for Love, or Benefits, or... : Same-Sex Marriage in Massachusetts

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This paper incorporates the presentations made at the American Psychological Association meetings in Washington, D.C., in August, 2005, as part of the symposium, "What I Did for Love, or Benefits, or...: Same-Sex Marriage in Massachusetts." The symposium was co-sponsored by Division 44, Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues and Division 35, Psychology of Women.

Major funding for the project came from the study group members who volunteered their evenings and weekends. Additionally, the Wellesley Centers for Women provided support from core funds; we received a generous donation from Risa Greenlindger, a Wellesley alumna, and classmates she persuaded to contribute to the study; and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues provided a grant-in-aid to Anne Noonan.

We are deeply grateful to the couples and families who welcomed us into their homes and shared their life histories with us.

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Suggested Citation: Same-Sex Marriage Study Group. (2005) *What I Did for Love, or Benefits, or...: Same-Sex Marriage in Massachusetts* (Wellesley Centers for Women, Working Paper No. 422). Wellesley, MA: Wellesley Centers for Women

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*A*bstract

The individual papers in this compilation are based on the results of the Exploratory Study of the Impact of Legalization of Marriage on Same-Sex Couples that were presented at the American Psychological Association meetings in August 2005 in Washington, D.C. The Introduction describes the study group process that resulted in this collaborative project, the study methodology and its limitations. "Tying the Knot" describes the history of same-sex marriage and presents some of the qualitative findings related to the experiences of lesbian and gay couples in response to legalization of same-sex marriage. "Doing Marriage" discusses whether and how legalization of same-sex marriage influenced same-sex partners' commitment to one another, presentation to others as a couple, and treatment as a couple by others. "Goin' to the Chapel?" describes the role of religion and spirituality in the context of the decision to marry or not. "These Are My Parents" presents both the children's and parents' views of the impact of legalization of same-sex marriage on the experiences of children growing up in same-sex families. The "Co-chair's Comments" follows the papers. The compilation is concluded by a "List of the Study Group Members" and a "Glossary of Terms."

Introduction

Sumru Erkut

On November 17 of 2003, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts handed down a ruling which went into effect six months later on May 17, 2004:

Barred access to the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage, a person who enters into an intimate, exclusive union with another of the same sex is arbitrarily deprived of membership in one of our community's most rewarding and cherished institutions. That exclusion is incompatible with the constitutional principles of respect for individual autonomy and equality under law.

The court ruling made it clear that exclusion of people in same-sex relationships from the institution of legal marriage is incompatible with the constitutional principles. In places like Cambridge and Boston, starting at midnight, lines formed in front of the city hall of people who wanted to apply for marriage licenses. Thus, on May 17, 2004 an historic moment emerged, not only for Massachusetts but for the nation. It is a moment my colleagues and I seized.

This project began in an informal study group at the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW). Our intense interest in the social changes that were occurring in Massachusetts and the nation is what brought a group of us together immediately after May 17, 2004, just to share our enthusiasm and explore the impact of the legalization. Being the staff of a research organization, it did not take us long to come up with the idea that we should work on a research plan. The research project was initiated, planned, and executed by the study group whose members represent a broad cross-section of WCW staff in a variety of disciplines and roles (a listing of members is in **Appendix A**).

The study group decided to launch an exploratory research project to examine how lesbian and gay couples in Massachusetts experienced the legalization of same-sex marriage and to describe the diversity of their experiences along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, and parenting status. The study also examined how children in same-sex families perceived and experienced this social change. The approach was informed by a human rights and social exclusion framework to examine same-sex couples' and their children's lives and the quality of their relationships once legal marriage became an option. Our examination of the impact of legalization on children in same-sex families did not and does not view legal marriage as the only or best way to raise children. Similarly, we approached the topic of same-sex marriage with the view that legal marriage is but one of the forms of intimate relationships, coupling, and family formation.

Overview

Each of the papers in the symposium presents an examination of a different facet of the data. Diane Purvin, Michelle Porche, and Jasmine Waddell's paper places the legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts into an historical perspective and shares some general qualitative findings from the study. The second paper, by Ellen Schecter, Allison Tracy, Konjit Page, and Gloria Luong, explores whether and how legalization of same-sex marriage impacted same-sex partners' commitment to one another, presentation to others as a couple, and treatment as a couple by others, focusing on the role and effect of ceremonies of commitment (both legal and non-legal). Anne Noonan and Catherine Senghas write about same-sex couples' religious/spiritual perspectives on legalized marriage. Georgia Hall explores how children in same-sex families have experienced the legalization of marriage for their parents. The comments of Connie Chan, the Co-Chair of the symposium, are followed by a list of the study group members and a glossary of terms used in the papers.

Methodology

All papers in this compilation are based on data from interviews with 50 same-sex couples; hence they share a common sampling design and data collection methodology. The methodology section and Table 1 are excerpted from Porche, Purvin, and Waddell (2005).

Sample. In our recruitment efforts, reaching out to over 80 LGBT organizations, we made every attempt to get a diverse sample of women and men, by race and ethnicity, SES, choice of getting married or not, and family circumstances of having children or not. All participants had to have been in committed relationships for at least one year.

Almost three fourths of the participants had gotten legally married, and this occurred in the first 6 months after legalization. Our sample was about one-third male and two-thirds female (Table 1). The majority identified as White, though we did have some respondents from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and 34% of the couples were in interracial relationships. On average, our sample was highly educated with the majority having advanced degrees, and most describing themselves as coming from a middle-class background. Almost a third of the participants had children. In the state of Massachusetts, 65% of the same-sex couples who got married from May 17th to the end of the first year of legalization were women, and 35% were men. While we can't make claims about representativeness of our sample, our numbers are very similar as lesbians comprise 61% of our same-sex wedded couples.

Data collection. We collected both quantitative and qualitative data from the couples. Participants completed a brief questionnaire that included demographic questions, degree of being out, and items about relationship quality including Spanier's (1979) Dyadic Adjustment Scale. These data were meant to provide a context for understanding the processes described in the qualitative interviews. In

addition, we conducted our preliminary analysis by incorporating grouping by marital status.

The interviews were semi-structured. We first interviewed members of the couples individually, then the couples together, and finally any participating children ages 8 and older. Data were collected on relationship history, couples' joint decision-making, and the impact that the same-sex marriage legislation had in their relationship. To safeguard against breeches of confidentiality, before their interview started, all participants were asked to choose a pseudonym under which their data would be stored and reported. In the papers that follow the Introduction, direct quotations from the interviews are identified by these pseudonyms.

Qualitative analyses. For the qualitative analyses, the transcribed interview sets were entered in an Atlas.TI qualitative database. The study group agreed on a number of descriptive topic codes to begin to parse out the data. We selected four out of these descriptive codes for preliminary examination—one for each of the four papers presented here—the history of the current relationship; the impact the history of the current relationship; the impact of legalization of same-sex marriage; the place of religion and spirituality in same-sex relationships; and children in same-sex families. There was some overlap in this first level of coding depending on how individuals or couples responded to interview prompts.

We give an illustration of the coding process for examining the impact of the court decision. In this example we use the Level 1 topic code *legalization period*. We looked to narratives from both the couple and individual interviews specifically responding to questions related to the court decision. All discussion about the legalization period was included in the topic code used for this analysis. We read through all the transcript sections given the Level 1 *legalization* code to begin an inductive process of creating interpretive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from a number

of emerging themes. These included aspects of relationships that changed or remained the same in light of legalization; the legitimacy that legal marriage confers; benefits and their limits; LGBT marginalization contrasting with mainstreaming that potentially accompanies married life; and the shining of a public spotlight on previously private relationships. Considered together, these interpretive codes illustrate the variation in perceptions and responses to the issues that emerged in respondents' worlds and lives in the wake of legalization. The same process of going from the general descriptive to the more specific interpretive codes was implemented for the other three topics.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the study was the self-selected nature of our participants, all of whom were residents of Massachusetts. Despite purposeful sampling efforts, obtaining a diverse sample of same-sex couples with regard to race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status was challenging, resulting in a largely White, middle-class sample. As such, the results should not be generalized to all same-sex relationships.

Also, undoubtedly, the findings are very much influenced by the timing of the data collection which took place within one year of the legalization ruling. Future marriage cohorts are not likely to include couples who had been in a committed relationship for several decades before getting married. Whether future same-sex marriages in Massachusetts will be similar to or different from those that took place during the first year of legalization is an empirical question that awaits further study.

In addition, this study relied largely on interview narratives. Within-couple discrepancies or failure by one partner to mention a commitment marker or event mentioned by the other may not mean the event did not occur, nor that it was insignificant, but rather may reflect individual differences in how the relationship story is told. For example,

stories may be told in socially desirable ways, or individual privacy needs may result in events being related superficially or not at all. Findings should be interpreted narrowly, with the subjectively-centered methodology in mind.

Directions for Future Research

This study presents data from a unique cohort at a specific point in LGBT history. Continuing scientific investigation into the effects of equal marriage legislation should consider a large-scale representative sample to track the development of same-sex relationships over time, post-legislation, and further understanding of the intersection of healthy development, psychological well-being, and discrimination, and the place of LGBT civil rights within the larger landscape of civil rights.

A larger, more inclusive study to address several of the limitations of this initial, exploratory study is needed. Future data collection should attempt to include more participants from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic statuses, as well as other demographic backgrounds. Further interviews with family members of these couples may provide a richer context through which same-sex couples' relationships can be viewed.

Same-sex marriage legalization is a shifting landscape, both internationally and nationally. During the year that this paper was prepared, Canada and Spain legalized same-sex marriage, California's legislature legalized same-sex marriage although the bill was vetoed by that state's Governor, Washington and Oregon await legislative and court action, and Massachusetts' battle over legalization continues. The experiences of same-sex couples in committed relationships residing in states considering similar legislation, as well as states far from such legislation, could provide further understanding of the implications of the availability of same-sex marriage on same-sex couples' relationships. We hope to collaborate with others researching this phenomenon both nationally

and around the world.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of individuals in same-sex couples (n=100)

	Percent
<i>Relationship Status</i>	
Legally Married	72%
Unmarried/In a Committed Relationship	28%
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	64%
Male	36%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
African American/Black	5%
Asian	5%
Latino/a	7%
White	78%
Mixed Ancestry	5%
<i>Education Level</i>	
GED	1%
Some College	6%
Two-Year College (Associate's Degree)	1%
Four-Year College (Bachelor's Degree)	30%
Master's Degree	48%
Doctorate	13%
Other (Trade School)	1%
<i>Socio-Economic Status of Family of Origin</i>	
Poor	4%
Working Class	19%
Lower Middle Class	19%
Middle Class	36%
Upper Middle Class	19%
Upper Class	0%
<i>Parental Status</i>	
With Children	29% ^a
No Children	71%
	Mean (Range)
Age of Respondent: Full Sample	44 years old (22 – 76 years old)
Age of Respondent: Married	45 years old (28 – 62 years old)
Age of Respondent: Unmarried	41 years old (22 – 76 years old)

^a Includes one man who fathered a child for a lesbian friend. Although he sees the child regularly, he is not a primary caregiver nor is he financially responsible for her.

Tying the Knot: The Context of Social Change in Massachusetts¹

Diane M. Purvin, Ph.D.
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Wellesley Centers for Women

Background

In the U.S., marriage has a long history of exclusivity, limited to free white men and women through most of the 1800s, then limited to same-race couples until the *Loving v. Virginia* ruling in 1967 allowing interracial marriage. Marriage has historically been governed by religious institutions and even after legal aspects of it were taken over by the state, religious conventions continue to prevail and are used to justify the constraint of marriage to a heterosexual union. In 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was signed into Federal law proclaiming marriage between one man and one woman, thereby ensuring that 49 states and the federal government do not have to recognize the legal marriage of same-sex Massachusetts couples.

However novel same-sex marriage might seem to us now, there has been a history of unofficial gay marriage starting with Boston Marriages in the 1800s, to Harlem weddings in the 20s, to the 85,000 unions performed by the Metropolitan Community Church starting in late 60s, which also coincided with attempts by same-sex couples to apply for marriage licenses in states around the country. These attempts at getting licenses were largely dismissed and ignored, except for the move by state governments to introduce early versions of laws prohibiting same-sex marriage.

Against the backdrop of a gay and lesbian liberation movement that began with Stonewall, the growing lesbian baby boom, and the devastating effect of AIDS, the idea of marriage as necessary protection for couples and families became popular in

the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community. The repeal of sodomy laws in Texas by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003) and the enactment of civil unions in Vermont set the stage for legal same-sex marriage in Massachusetts.

In this summary, we present an overview of our methods and findings related to the investigation of experiences of lesbian and gay couples in response to legalization of same-sex marriage (for a full analysis see Porche, Purvin, & Waddell, 2005).

Quantitative Results

On average, our married couples reported being together about 12 years and our unmarried couples about 10 years, though there was no significant difference in length of relationship. Both married and unmarried couples reported a wide range in the length of their relationships. Many couples in both groups are in long term relationships, with the longest being 40 years for a couple who decided not to get married. All of the couples with children in our sample had chosen to get married (**Table 1**).

Both married and unmarried participants reported high levels of being out, with an average of 3.62 or higher for each individual item on a set of questions about being out (1=*not out at all* to 4=*totally out*). Almost all participants (94%) reported being *totally out* to their immediate family, while three-fourths or more reported being *totally out* to neighbors, co-workers, and extended family.

We asked individuals to rate satisfaction with their relationship on a scale of 0 – extremely unhappy to 10 – extremely happy. Although the married participants gave significantly higher happiness ratings, the difference was small and both married and unmarried couples are on the high end of the scale. On the other hand, when we looked at divergence between individuals in couples on satisfaction ratings, married couples tended to show a small but significantly larger difference, compared to unmarried couples.

Qualitative Results

The legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts is an undeniably significant moment of social change. But what does legalizing such unions – in one state, during an era of rising conservative momentum, and given the consequent backlash – actually mean? Respondents who chose to legally marry, as well as those who had not chosen legal marriage, expressed a range of viewpoints on the significance and ultimate impact of this social and cultural moment.

Story #1: Just a piece of paper?

Before legalization, same-sex couples who wanted to make formal commitments to each other were restricted to extra-legal commitment ceremonies. Because we conducted this study just after legalized unions became an option, it included many couples who had already had weddings that were meaningful to them and their communities. Some of these involved religious ceremonies. This particular cohort can thus give us a very interesting and somewhat unique view of what exactly is gained through state-sanctioned unions. Is it “just a piece of paper,” or something more?

For these couples, the social change that came with legalization was external to their own relationship. As Lucy and Maisey, a White unmarried couple together for seven years, put it:

Lucy: I don't think our relationship changed at all.

Maisey: Um, we had – we had and continue to have really great conversations about what the Supreme Court's decision means for us and for our friends. But I don't think that our relationship changed. We had –

Lucy: It was the world that changed.

Maisey: The world changed. Yeah, or the Massachusetts world changed.

However, others told us that there was something uniquely meaningful about having the relationship legalized by the state.

Rod (White, married, 27-year relationship): It has been an amazing experience. I do feel in some fundamental way that it has changed me in the sense of legitimizing me in a way that I - you know I always used to say that I'm married before but it wasn't real. And now it's real, you know? It's real, real. You know? I mean it's like legal real. In that way I think it fundamentally changes the way I approach the world. You know? It's like, "Are you married?" "Yeah!" And it's your problem to figure out who it is that I'm married to, or whether this is a straight marriage or a gay marriage or whatever. And I'm extraordinarily grateful for the opportunity to do that.

Story #2: What definitely changed were the benefits

Regardless of whether they believed that legalization changed their personal relationship, and whether or not they chose to marry, all respondents clearly recognized the tangible and intangible benefits that come with official state approval. These include access to family health insurance, legitimacy for second parents, and next of kin status in medical contexts. The issue of medical access, privileges and decision-making was specifically mentioned by a number of families; this was one of the issues that prompted the Goodridges to file their lawsuit.

Linda and Sally, a White couple together for 24 years, describe the primacy of a marriage license for their family's legal protection:

Linda: Well, I honestly feel like, not to be unromantic but, the marriage part was really just the medical benefits and that sort of the financial and...

Sally: *Get the piece of paper.*

Linda: *Right and, just the things that help the family in a time of crisis.*

Beyond the actual protections and improved finances, there is a certain entitlement to such benefits that is conferred by legal marriage. As Ada, a White, married lesbian in a 5-year relationship describes:

If we didn't have a legal marriage, I would feel like I was constantly on the defensive about what should I do, how I should do it and... And instead I'm able to take a much more assertive stance and be able to advocate for the family in a way I didn't feel like I could have before, because I didn't have anything behind me to do it.

The transformation from a defensive to a secure position with respect to her family and their public entitlements described by Ada reflects what other respondents identified as the sense of "safety" or protection that comes as both a formal and informal benefit of legalized marriage.

Jaidyn (White, married, 10-year relationship): *To be legally validated and whether or not someone likes it, we're married. They can't say 'Well, that's not real'. So there was that and- I, I think there was a feeling of safety that would come along with the legal marriage. Which- safety, like- We were very safe in our relationship with one another, in our lives, but safety from people who might want to deny us our civil rights.*

But how much safety and security are gained when a marriage is legal in just one state? This question is critical, particularly given the hostile national climate and federal legal restrictions to the tangible and intangible benefits of legal marriage described here. We turn to the next story.

Story #3: *But the benefits are conditional...*

Despite the real benefits and protections that come to same-sex couples in legalized unions, the fact that these are restricted to Massachusetts, and the intense opposition to same-sex marriage by other states and the federal government, places significant limitations on these benefits. In particular, the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) creates unequal financial burdens on couples who choose to take advantage of the availability of family benefits that are state but not federally recognized.

Leo, a White, married man in a 27-year relationship, described the dilemma confronting many couples in the study as they contemplated taking advantage of the new opportunity to put a same-sex partner on the other partner's family health insurance plan.

Leo: I could bring him under [my] health insurance now, but there is still - from where the federal DOMA, which basically says marriage is between a man and a woman and the state law that says we're legally married, where those two intersect. So, even though I could bring him under my health insurance, I would have to pay a tax on the contribution the state of Massachusetts - because I was a state employee. So [the money that] the state of Massachusetts makes towards his health insurance, I'd have to pay a tax on that. That's a considerable amount, because the state pays seventy-five percent of the insurance. So, at some point we will probably still do that because [he] won't have any health insurance at some point. And then it won't really matter whether it's taxed or not taxed. It will still be a better alternative to not having anything. But there are still some penalties that same-sex couples face that opposite sex couples don't.

In cases where there is a federally recognized spouse, the money that an employer contributes to

cover the cost of health insurance for a spouse under a family health plan is not considered income to the insured spouse, and so is not taxed.

Others noted that this limited legal recognition requires that couples maintain and in some cases undertake new specific legal agreements to ensure that their kin relationship will be recognized in a variety of situations. As Joy, a Filipina lesbian explained, along with her wife Jaidyn:

Joy: And we still did a will, because before our trip even though, technically now everything...it will say that everything will go to Jaidyn. But we were advised by friends and attorneys to still have a very specific will. So there's a lot of things that still need to happen, but...

Jaidyn: I think until it's federally recognized, we will have only minimal rights.

As several of our married respondents noted, even though they do feel safer and protected, they still carry their marriage licenses with them as “proof,” particularly when they travel out of town.

Bella (White, married, 8-year relationship): We still have to have all this legal paperwork drawn up even though we're married here because it doesn't matter anywhere else. So that just even made it more - I mean so it makes it great here in Massachusetts but it makes me... it makes it more work still because if you go anywhere else, you have to walk around with this wad of paperwork in our back pocket. You know, or carry it around in a firebox. You know?

Story #4a: From margin . . .

The ability and choice to legally marry *de facto* moved same-sex couples more into the mainstream of United States society. As a people with a history of enforced marginalization by the mainstream, the LGBT community has placed a tremendous effort and importance on establishing positive

identities outside of the mainstream, and in a sense re-defined this margin. In asking specific questions of the participants of the degree they felt “part of the mainstream” upon getting married, we found that the mainstreaming of the community wrought by the legalization of same-sex marriage, however limited, presents new dilemmas of identity.

Some couples were more adamant about wanting to maintain a separate gay identity and would rather redefine mainstream than be a part of it. Rod and Leo, a White gay male couple together for over 27-years illustrate this position.

Rod: We're - I'm always aware of the fact that we're aliens..., and because we live in [this town], usually, we're the only gay people wherever we are. You know? In restaurants, or at the supermarket...

Leo: To be honest, that's part of some our baggage that we carry with us, too... So, part of it is kind of on our part, a choice to somewhat remain separate. -

Rod: I want to be part of the mainstream according to my rules... we're not mainstream in our political views, we're not mainstream in our religious views, and we're not mainstream in our sexual orientation.

Jim, an African American gay man who has been with his husband for 11 years, also echoes sentiments about inequities, as he describes the invisibility of race and ethnicity.

Jim: I feel like we're like in a same-sex marriage - and that's not quite mainstream yet. And I don't think that - that even among same-sex marriages I don't think we're mainstream.

Interviewer: WHY?

Jim: 'Cause we're not White, and I feel like that's... if mainstream is what's popular, what

- you know, the images that you see, you know, who gets talked about...

For those like Camilla who value the LGBT community's role as a challenger of problematic social norms, the decision to pursue same-sex marriage represents perhaps as much a loss as a gain.

Camilla (White, unmarried, 3-year relationship): *That people, that all these queers were trying to be straight and everybody is giving up on like radicalism. But like really angry about it. And I have similar feelings. Not so much about people trying to be straight or whatever, I don't really care about that, but that this really is or symbolizes an end to radicalism or whatever.*

Story #4b: ...to mainstream?

But other respondents do not feel torn by this dilemma, as Molly describes here.

Molly (White, married, 13-relationship): *I always feel mainstream. I'm very...I mean, our lives are no different than a heterosexual couple. I mean, ever since the time you wake up in the morning to the time you sleep at night, every aspect of our lives is identical to any heterosexual couple so... just because we now have a piece of paper that you know, formally legitimized our life, I don't really feel that it's changed at all other than maybe there are some out there now who will see us as quote unquote real as opposed to you know, playing house kind of a thing.*

For these families, who described themselves as living very mainstream lives both prior to and after legalization, legalization is more like the icing on the cake. Most respondents' views on mainstreaming fell somewhere along a continuum between Camilla and Molly, and it's not clear yet if there is a critical mass of sentiment or where that would fall. Preliminary evidence suggests that

other identities, such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, along with personal histories, are likely to have a big influence on how people see themselves in terms of marginalization or mainstreaming.

Story #5: The shifting landscape of public and private

Prior to legalization, many communities and employers in Massachusetts had instituted domestic partner benefits as a means of including same-sex couples. This is changing, as some have ended domestic partner benefits now that civil marriage is available, and others are in the process of determining whether to change policies.

This new social moment is creating unanticipated external pressures on some same-sex couples to marry – as one participant puts it, a new kind of “shotgun wedding.”

Fred (White, gay male, married, 16-year relationship): *Everything was pretty much as it was -the hospital has filed an equivalency and it was interesting, after they passed the marriage [legislation] on May 17th, the hospital said that if you are domestic partners you have to get married, because now you have that opportunity, you have the ability to marry. Right, so until the end of the year. So I felt like, 'Oh my God, we're doing a shotgun wedding.' [laughter]*

Other respondents, like Bonnie, described new social pressures from family and friends who were now asking questions about their relationship, status, and plans that were not previously asked.

Bonnie (White, unmarried, 4-year relationship): *I mean even our—[relatives]— I've seen them since we decided that we definitely aren't going to do any kind of formal thing. So I got, you know, the grilling about, 'So why aren't you doing this?' And I was explaining to them about the whole tax situation and they're like, 'But no! You would file federal taxes as if you're*

married.' And I was like, 'It's not that simple, people! Just because we're married on a state level, I mean it doesn't necessarily mean much of anything anywhere else.' Like they - they're happily naïve about it but also, you know, contributing to the problem in their own way.

Some respondents who had strong legal, financial, personal, or political reasons for not marrying legally resented this; others welcomed it as a new level of connection. Whether intended or not, these inquiries put a public face on what had previously been a more private relationship, protected to some degree from public scrutiny. This development is especially interesting to consider in light of feminist critiques of marriage as conferring a degree of privacy that endangers women.

Story #6: Is pushing for legal marriage the best or most effective means of assuring civil rights for same-sex couples?

Although the majority of respondents, both married and unmarried, felt that the legalization of same-sex marriage was a very positive development, several expressed some reservations. Some, like Morgan, felt that by pushing for inclusion in marriage, as opposed to civil unions, the LGBT movement was unnecessarily generating resistance and potentially delaying or slowing the process to greater civil rights for people in same-sex partnerships.

Morgen (White, unmarried, 40-year relationship): We were saying that the all or nothing approach may not have been the way to go in our view, because of our age, because of how long we've been together, because of our needs of estate planning that aren't as prominent for younger people. That I think we think that probably a civil union, civil rights could have gotten through constitutionally as well as through the fundamentalist religious groups because you cannot deny rights to people. It's not Animal Farm. Some are not more equal than others, we're supposed to be equal, whatever

that means. So we would prefer to see the civil rights issue brought up first, and then have commitment ceremonies and, thirdly, as part of all the talk, that marriage becomes part and parcel and now [unclear] of the religions that want to adopt it

Others, like Transcendent, felt that the strategy of vigorously pursuing marriage played into right-wing hands by providing them with fuel to prey on people's homophobic fears.

Transcendent (Biracial, unmarried, 27 year relationship): No, I thought it was - I thought it was a disaster, the ruling because I thought it would give the Bush people exactly the ammunition it did. I thought it was a very stupid ruling. I felt that the Massachusetts Court did more damage, and then I thought the mayor of San Francisco threw oil on the flame. And I think the ruling a couple days ago in New York did the same thing. These rulings are way ahead of the public curve in this country and they're doing more damage than good. It's like all of the so-called gay liberation shows on T.V. do more damage than they do good. I think. It gives people more ammunition.

Concerns such as these may arise from personal experience with backlash, may reflect generational differences in LGBT identities and values, may reflect internalized homophobia, or may have other interpretations. Regardless of their origin, these apprehensions represent real views that exist in the community. This cannot be dismissed, and must be grappled with as the movement moves forward and plots its next course in the midst of both progress and backlash.

Conclusion

The same-sex couples in our convenience sample, both married and unmarried, were engaged in

long-term committed relationships, expressed high levels of satisfaction in those relationships, and were comfortable being out to family and community. They reflected a wide range of views as to the importance of marriage in making choices about their own relationships, while at the same time being like-minded in stressing the importance and value of the legalization of same-sex marriage or some form of civil union as a civil right. Key themes included aspects of relationships that changed or remained the same in light of legalization, legitimacy that legal marriage confers, benefits and their limits, LGBT marginalization contrasting with mainstreaming of married life, the public spotlight on previously private relationships, and the direction of the movement for civil rights in the LGBT community.

This study presents data from a unique cohort at a specific point in LGBT history. Many of the couples

who were the first to take advantage of the ability to legally exchange vows had already been engaged in committed long-term relationships, yet this legal transition was one that may have seemed beyond reach in their lifetimes. We are able to get a sense of the profound difference legalization can make in the context of legitimizing an ongoing same-sex relationship, thus legitimizing sexual identity as well. We can only hypothesize about the positive impact that legalization can have on LGBT young people's sexual identity development. Continuing scientific investigation into the effects of equal marriage legislation should consider a large-scale representative sample to track the development of same-sex relationships over time, post-legislation. This research can also further understanding of the intersection of healthy development, psychological well-being, and discrimination, and the place of LGBT civil rights within the larger landscape of civil rights.

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Table 1. Characteristics of same-sex couples by relationship status (n=50 couples)

	Married	In a Committed Relationship	<i>t</i>
Gender			
Lesbian Couples	61%	71%	
Gay Male Couples	39%	29%	
Length of Relationship			
Mean	12.30 years	9.56 years	1.05
SD	7.33 years	11.01 years	
Range	2 years to 29.5 years	22 months to 40 years	
Family Constellation			
With Children	40%	0%	
No Children	60%	100%	
Rating of Relationship Satisfaction (on a 0 to 10 point scale)			
Mean	9.15	8.57	2.00*
SD	0.99	1.07	
Range	6 - 10	6 - 10	
Difference Between Partners in Couples on Rating of Relationship Satisfaction			
Mean	0.69	0.29	-2.09*
SD	0.67	0.47	
Range	0 - 2	0 - 1	
Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale: Consensus Subscale Mean Score (from 4=little to no conflict to 1=constant conflict)			
Mean	3.57	3.57	0.07
SD	0.23	.028	
Range	2.92 - 4.00	3.08 - 4.00	

* $p < .05$

**“Doing Marriage”:
Same-Sex Relationship Dynamics in the
Post-Legalization Period**

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In the U.S. culture, getting married is a legally, socially, and often spiritually sanctioned joining of two people in an intimate relationship, and has previously been the exclusive right of heterosexual people. The availability of legal same-sex marriage in Massachusetts offers a unique opportunity to examine the meaning and effects of gaining social and legal sanction for committed same-sex relationships for the first time in this country.

Our study group was interested in whether and how legalization of same-sex marriage impacted same-sex partners' commitment to one another, presentation to others as a couple, and treatment as a couple by others. In this paper, we explore couples' decisions about legal marriage, their expressions of commitment prior to and subsequent to the legalization of same-sex marriage, and their views of others' perceptions regarding their commitment, whether or not they chose to marry.

This paper presents preliminary findings concerning couples' expressions of commitment and decisions about legal marriage, and focuses on one specific expression of commitment: ceremonies (see Schecter, Tracy, Page & Luong, 2005, for an in-depth description and discussion of this research and additional findings). Throughout the paper, we will use the term “commitment ceremony” to refer to

a social/spiritual but extra-legal ceremony, while “civil ceremony” or “legal marriage” will refer to a legal marriage ceremony.

Background

Lesbian and Gay Relationships

Literature on lesbian and gay relationships has developed since the late 1970s and comprises five major areas: (1) the unique issues faced by same-sex couples (coming out, being closeted with families of origin and children, lack of social support, lack of legal support); (2) relationship dynamics (power, sexuality, division of labor, conflict, influence strategies, fusion/distance); (3) relationship satisfaction; (4) same-sex parenting; and (5) comparisons of same-sex and heterosexual couples (see Peplau, 1993, and Kurdek, 1995, for reviews of literature on gay and lesbian relationships in general; see Hall, 2005, in this collection, for a review of gay and lesbian parenting literature).

A few models of gay and lesbian relationship development have been advanced, two for gay male relationships (Harry & Lovely, 1979; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984) and two for lesbian relationships (Clunis & Green, 1988; Slater, 1995). All but Joseph Harry and Robert Lovely's model, which focused on monogamy/non-monogamy, propose various stages of relationship development reflecting couple formation, change, and maintenance. David McWhirter and Andrew Mattison's model was based on a research study; the others came from clinical observation or previous models. In short, we know relatively little about the development of gay and lesbian committed relationships.

Commitment Ceremonies

In the absence of legal marriage as a means of formalizing and socially sanctioning their relationships, many gay and lesbian couples have created and participated in commitment ceremonies (Eskridge Jr., 2002). Commitment ceremonies are fairly new phenomena in the gay and lesbian

Method

community, emerging in the late 1970s. Same-sex couples have had few if any templates on which they can base their commitment ceremony scripts, and many ceremonies combine aspects of traditional heterosexual weddings with uniquely personalized features conveying key messages about the couple's love and commitment for one another and about their sexuality (Butler, 1990; McQueeney, 2003; Tanner, 1978).

Despite lacking legal recognition, gay and lesbian couples have cited personal, social, and political reasons for having a commitment ceremony (Liddle & Liddle, 2004). These include formalizing or legitimizing the relationship; publicly declaring feelings and commitment for one's partner; validating the relationship in the eyes of the couples' social network, including friends, family, and religious groups; and encouraging guests to confront and question existing laws and support same-sex equality (Butler, 1990; Liddle & Liddle, 2004; McQueeney, 2003; Tanner, 1978). Indeed, commitment ceremonies may affect public opinion positively, especially for those who are able to witness the ceremonies (Butler, 1990; Bourassa, 2004; Liddle & Liddle, 2004).

Research on the significance of commitment ceremonies in the gay and lesbian community is limited in scope and nature. Much of the literature is based on personal anecdotes, case studies, or studies of small sample sizes. However, what we do know about commitment ceremonies sheds light on how it has played a role in legitimizing and formalizing same-sex relationships in the LGBT community.

For the first time in our history, same-sex couples in Massachusetts have an alternative to extra-legal commitment ceremonies: they can get legally married. The meaning of legal marriage for same-sex couples' relationships, their decisions about legal marriage, and the meaning of their ceremonies of commitment (both legal and extra-legal) in the post-legalization era are the focus of this paper.

The overall methodology and participant sample for the present study has been described elsewhere (Porche, Purvin, and Waddell, 2005). Here, we offer a brief description of the participants in terms of their marital and parenting status (see Schechter et al., 2005 for a more complete description of methodology and sample statistics).

Our sample of 50 couples consisted of 32 lesbian and 18 gay male couples. Fourteen couples were parents (11 lesbian, 3 gay male; 29%); 36 (21 lesbian, 15 gay male; 71%) were not. Thirty-six couples were legally married (72%: 22 lesbian, 14 gay male), including all couples parenting dependent children, while 14 couples chose not to legally marry (28%).

The main source of information for the present analysis came from responses to an interview prompt to each individual in the couple to tell the story of their relationship. Other sections of participant interviews were also used where relevant data were found.

Interview transcripts were analyzed for markers of commitment, i.e., events or practices signaling commitment. We defined "commitment" as *devotion to one's partner and to the couple as a unit*. Commitment markers were identified in four interconnected spheres: self, couple, intimate social and family circle, and wider social circle/society.

Examination of the identified commitment events suggested the following coding categories, referred to as "commitment events" or "commitment markers" throughout the paper, as delineated below:

- "Exclusive": Dating each other exclusively, closing the relationship sexually
- "Tell": Saying "I love you", "Would you marry me?" etc.
- "Feel": Feeling desire or intention to be with each other forever
- "Cohabit": Living together

- “Money”: Merging finances
- “Protect”: Establishing legal benefits and protections
- “Venture”: Joint undertakings such as buying a house and co-parenting
- “Ties”: Integrating friends, kin families and families of choice
- “Symbol”: Rings or similar item signifying status as committed couple
- “Ceremony”: Public commitment ritual; all forms, including legal marriage
- “Naming”: Name changes, use of terminology (“husband”, “spouse” etc.)
- “Journey”: Taking significant trips together
- “Unity”: Presenting selves, and insisting on recognition, as a couple
- “Support”: Providing significant support during crisis, transitions, etc.
- “Media”: Giving media interviews, web presence, etc. as a married couple

We constructed a summary table of demographic information, relationship events, and commitment markers for each couple (see example in Figure 1). We refer to these summary tables as “Relationship

Maps”. These Relationship Maps were constructed from narrative data where dates and ages weren’t always explicit. All available information was used to reconstruct relationship timelines as accurately as possible. The Maps showed commitment markers as well as demographic data for each individual (chosen or assigned pseudonym, race and ethnicity, social class background, parenting status, education level, and subjective socioeconomic status).

The Relationship Maps allowed us to see similarities across, as well as differences within, the couples’ narratives of their relationship and commitment development. The absence of a given commitment marker for any couple did not mean the commitment marker did not occur, only that it wasn’t specifically mentioned by one or both individuals.

The Maps also allowed us to clearly see whether and when in the timeline of the relationship a couple chose to have a social/spiritual commitment ceremony, legal marriage, or both. Findings concerning the sequence of commitment events other than ceremonies can be found in Schecter et al., 2005.

Figure 1. Relationship Map example^a.

Lesbian
 Legally Married
 1 child (conceived in the context of the current relationship)

		Mona White Middle Class Biological Mother Bachelor's Degree SSS- 5 ^b		Dora Latina Middle Class Co-mother Bachelor's Degree SSS- 7 ^b	
Years	Date	Age	Transition Event	Age	Transition Event
0	1996	21		19	Feel
1	1997	22	Crisis (death of grandparent)	20	Crisis (separation)
2	1998	23		21	
3	1999	24	Cohabit Tell Naming (“proposed”)	22	Cohabit Venture (pets) Naming (“family”)
4	2000	25	Crisis (partner's grandparent's death) Ceremony (commitment) Ties (families)	23	Ceremony (commitment) Naming (“wedding”, “wife”) Passive (rings)
5	2001	26		24	
6	2002	27	Venture (bought house)	25	Venture (bought house)
7	2003	28		26	
8	2004	29	Ceremony (legal)	27	Ceremony (legal)
9	2005	30	Venture (co-parenting)	28	Venture (co-parenting)

^a Some information in this Relationship Map has been changed for the protection of the identity of the study participants.

^b Subjective social status rating; see description in Schecter et al., 2005.

Findings²

Timing of Ceremonies in Same-Sex Relationships

For those who chose to publicly mark their commitment prior to legalization, commitment ceremonies most commonly occurred after a couple had been together 2-3 years; the second most common time was at 10 years. However, legal marriages occurred in a wide range of relationship years, due to the fact that legal marriage only became available at and after a given point in time (May 2004) and due to uncertainty about its future availability. It should be noted that this cohort, being the first to be able to legally marry, may well have unique patterns of timing of legal marriage that may not be duplicated in subsequent cohorts.

Choosing to Eschew Public Marking of Commitment

Slightly more than one quarter of the couples chose not to publicly mark their commitment with a ceremony of any kind (three gay couples & 10 lesbian couples: 27%). Participants cited three main reasons for this decision: (a) while they felt committed to each other, they felt a public ceremony was premature; (b) one or both were essentially private people who preferred not to publicly “display” themselves; and (c) one or both had beliefs about marriage as an institution of patriarchy that precluded participating in a wedding-like ceremony, whether legal or not.

Mikey (Asian-American, not married, 9-year relationship): *We talked briefly about what would happen if we got married, but neither of us was really all that enthusiastic about the notion of marriage.*

His partner added,

Ben (White, not married, 9-year relationship): *I don't think we're helping ourselves or other people by signing up for an institution that in the end is just sort of irreparably patriarchal.*

Choosing to Publicly Commemorate Their Commitment

Nearly three quarters of the couples (74%; n=36) marked their commitment publicly in some way. The majority (61%; 7 gay couples & 15 lesbian couples) had a commitment ceremony, followed by a legal marriage when it became available; only one couple who had had a commitment ceremony chose not to get legally married (one gay couple; 2%). And, 36% (7 gay couples & 6 lesbian couples) were legally married with no prior commitment ceremony.

Couples who chose to mark their commitment publicly cited the significance of publicly affirming their relationship, both for themselves and for important others; gaining community (religious/spiritual and LGBT) recognition and support; gaining family recognition and support; and serving as role models for other/younger LGBT people.

Commitment Ceremonies and Legal Marriage Ceremonies

Couples who had both commitment ceremonies and legal marriages described the commitment ceremony as having the greater impact on the sense of commitment to the relationship and on the degree of social recognition of the relationship in their immediate social circles. Many ceremonies took place within a religious/spiritual community and setting; were planned and more formal than the legal marriage; and were typically large gatherings of friends, families of origin, and families of choice. Most couples referred to this ceremony as their “real wedding,” “emotional/spiritual” wedding, or “wedding” in contrast to their legal marriage.

Lisa (White, married, 10-year relationship): *We got spiritually married [in a commitment ceremony] seven years ago. We were recognized within our church community as a married couple. All of these kids recognized us as a*

married couple from the spiritual union. And y'know, everyone was excited that we could legally get married, for us, but we were- we were married.

Couples who were legally married with no prior commitment ceremony reported their wedding had meanings similar to those cited above. In other words, the first time that couples publicly pledged their commitment to one another held deep meaning, regardless of the legality of the ceremony.

Those couples who had both commitment and legal marriage ceremonies reported the latter were largely undertaken for the legal benefits, protection and recognition that legal marriage bestowed upon them and their families. (Upon greater reflection, however, participants elaborated on the emotional meanings underlying these more “practical” reasons; these are reported in the next section.) These marriage ceremonies were usually smaller and less formal than the commitment ceremony, ranging from impromptu trips to City Hall to small gatherings of a few intimate friends.

Ada (White, married, 5-year relationship).
Because we'd had such a big commitment ceremony, we didn't do a big wedding. We went just the two of us and signed papers and had a Justice of the Peace go through it. Which was kind of nice, — cause it was about what it was about, you know? And we didn't want a second anniversary. We felt like [the commitment ceremony] was the day in front of our family and friends, we made this official, and it's always going to be. So let's make May 17th just about when the state got with the program.

Some couples reported feeling a sense of urgency to marry. The primary reason given was concern that the right to legally marry would be revoked, based on knowledge of political efforts underway in Massachusetts to do just that. More than one couple reported that rather than waiting for a date of personal significance, e.g., the anniversary of their

commitment ceremony, they married as quickly as they could before their ability to do so was “taken away.” Secondarily, urgency came from a desire to take part in this particular historical moment and join this first cohort of legally married same-sex couples. Despite the sense of urgency, however, couples also reported that they would not have gotten married just because they were now legally able to. Rather, the right to legally marry either coincided with, or trailed, the level of commitment that made marriage a “natural next step” in their relationship.

Unexpected Impacts of Legal Marriage

As mentioned earlier, although the legal marriage was often cited as being “just a piece of paper,” couples reported additional and often unforeseen impacts of the marriage across the realms of self, family, and society. Participants frequently used words such as “powerful” or “profound” to describe the extent of these changes. For instance, while they had felt deeply committed to their partner previously, upon legally marrying, many described an unexpected qualitative deepening of commitment. This shift was hard for some to put into words.

Zelda (White, married, 3-year relationship):
Since we had our legal marriage, I'd say that actually has an impact on things, and since then we've went to work on conflicts in a deeper way, in a more meaningful way. We come to deeper understanding, we compromise more, I think we're more in love even since then. And um I don't know, it's the sense of commitment which I assumed was there just feels even deeper. Not that it wasn't there, but... it really surprised me, it really, really affected us. You know we would talk to gay couples who had gotten married, and we'd say, or they'd say, 'It really feels different, doesn't it? It really does. How weird is that?' The legal marriage was a political act. That said, when we were sort of brought into the public arena of married couples, everything changed.

That political act was really quite profound. It affected the way we felt about each other as a couple.

Some mentioned being surprisingly moved to hear traditional words of official state recognition such as “by the power vested in me...,” and reported that feelings of marginalization and internalized homophobia were lifted or eased.

Ralph (White, married, 17-year relationship): *I was aware that some of that [insecurity about marriage] was my own internalized homophobia and that I was afraid it would be ridiculed. I was afraid that unknown, unnamed people would either make fun of it or say that, ‘How can you be pretending that you’re getting married and it isn’t really marriage? It doesn’t really mean anything.’ Legitimizing [our relationship] legally also feels profound... my own internalized homophobia has to a great extent been lifted.*

Many couples reported that their legal marriage changed others’ perception of their commitment more than their own, citing examples of shifts in family and professional relationships. Participants said their marriage had brought themselves and their families together, had created extended families, and that family members “mellowed” and “transformed” in their acceptance of the couple.

Rose (Puerto Rican, married, 25-year relationship): *Once I was married, my business [partner] said it the best I could ever say. He said, “Welcome to the club.” And I think for other people, now they realize, yeah, we’re part of the marriage club now. We’re one of you. And I think that’s what it – for me, the difference really lies in that external perception versus how I feel about my commitment.*

Juncos (Puerto Rican, married, 7-year relationship): *The most recent sort of moment that I realized that my family has changed so much was during my wedding, especially*

with my mom. Because I think she was one of the people at the wedding that actually had this- like an epiphany almost? I mean, she- she always cares very much about Tiger but at that moment he became her son-in-law... I mean it’s really shocking how transforming it has been. I think it was an understanding. I think it was a realization that we are two individuals who love each other tremendously and that we are a family. Period. I mean, that’s what it is. You know, we’re a family and she needed to shed all those layers of culturally imposed prejudisms [sic] and preconceived notions of what gay relationships are all about and so forth. And it has been just wonderful in that regard.

Couples also discussed the impact being married had on their relationship with the larger society. Some mentioned feeling a sense of entitlement after being legally married, which was explained in two ways: (a) feeling entitled to call their partner “spouse,” “wife” or “husband,” which they may have done previously but now felt more entitled to do; and (b) feeling entitled to benefits and to force employers, state entities, insurance companies, and other societal institutions to recognize the legal status of their relationship.

Leo (White, married, 29-year relationship): *I called up the insurance agent and said, ‘Rod and I got married and we want the family discount.’*

Broader societal implications of being legally married that couples cited included feeling that they were role models for other and younger gay and lesbian couples, and that the legalization acted to counter long-time societal prejudices that gays and lesbians are incapable of deep and lasting relationships.

Leo (White, married, 29-year relationship): *The message always was that gay couples could not have committed, loving relationships. I think once it gets legitimized, it takes away that argument.*

Concerns about Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage

The legalization of same-sex marriage was experienced in complex ways, and couples' reflections on legal marriage as a "mainstream" event were telling. On the one hand, couples expressed a sense of justice and equality in having their same-sex relationships sanctioned socially and legally in ways that are normative for opposite-sex couples in this culture. At the same time, feelings of being seen as, in the words of some participants, "normal" sometimes conflicted with dismay at merging into a patriarchal institution and concern that the gay and lesbian community may be losing its uniqueness as well as the creativity that has characterized gay and lesbian commitment ceremonies.

Ned (White, married, 12-year relationship): *I kind of like having an identity separate from the straight community. I mean I think that's probably part of an issue for GLBT people. Many, many years go by and you have this sort of unique identity in this unique community and then there's this sort of merging into the straight environment in terms of marriage. And it can be difficult to give that up.*

Additionally, couples struggled with the language available to them to describe their partner and married relationship. Some thought it was important to claim the same terms used by married heterosexuals to denote their committed relationship to each other -- "wife" and "husband" -- as an expression of equality and "normalcy." For others, however, this desire conflicted with revulsion for heterosexual terms laden with patriarchal and sex-stereotyped meanings. The lack of alternative language was also mentioned as problematic.

Stephen (White, married, 16-year relationship): *He got annoyed with me again last night 'cause I introduced him to somebody and I didn't say anything [denoting couple*

status]. And he said, 'I don't get that.' And I said, 'Well this is what goes on inside my head, this is all unspoken: Hi, this is Aaron, he's my dot-dot-dot... Partner, no that's not right, husband, but I don't like that word, I know there's another word, I can't think of it, oh damn I'm just going to say partner. Partner? No, it's spouse!' And then Aaron said, 'But I don't like the word spouse,' and I said, 'I don't either but I kinda like it better than husband.'

Discussion

Lesbian and gay couples in the state of Massachusetts have found themselves in a unique position. An experience not previously available to them, the freedom to marry a same-sex partner, has recently become a real option, and in a very public manner. Controversy about same-sex marriage continues to dominate public discussion, in both straight and gay and lesbian communities. As a research team, we were able to seize this historical moment to investigate the impact of same-sex marriage legalization upon the lives and relationships of same-sex couples.

While some couples chose not to mark their commitment with public ceremonies of any kind, the majority found meaning in doing so. For these couples, committing to one another in front of friends and family was found to be deeply meaningful regardless of whether or not the ceremony was legally sanctioned.

Decisions to get legally married were largely attributed to gaining legal protections provided by civil marriage. Many couples also reported unforeseen impacts of becoming legally married. These included a deeper sense of commitment to one another, greater acknowledgement of the couple by families and professional peers, and reduction of internal, familial, and societal homophobia. Many couples commented on the political efforts to revoke same-sex marriage and the sense of urgency they felt to both be a part of history and marry before the right to do so was taken away from them.

The complexity of feelings surrounding same-sex marriage was also reflected by participants, both legally married and not. While reporting a sense of justice and equality at having their same-sex relationships sanctioned in the same way as heterosexual ones, some also voiced reluctance to join in a mainstream or patriarchal ritual. Some couples spoke of a hard-won acceptance as “normal,” “ordinary,” and “the same” as heterosexual couples, while others voiced their fear of losing the uniqueness of their gay and lesbian communities. Some married couples emphatically claimed the usually-heterosexual terms of “wife” and “husband,” and others struggled with choosing language to signal their newly legal marital status. It should be noted that while some couples voiced one or the other of these views, others reported both, living with the dialectic of conflicting feelings.

By far the majority of couples that participated in this study, including those who chose not to legally marry, placed a prominent value upon the concept and the availability of marriage for same-sex couples. Among the various rationales for the significance of marriage for these couples were access to legal protections; validation and recognition by others; integration into families and various types of communities; enhanced family bonds; and countering homophobic messages about gays and lesbians and their relationships.

In short, legal marriage appears to have meaning for same-sex couples not only for its legal protections but as a symbol of recognition of and respect for

same-sex relationships. Many couples mentioned a sense of greater “legitimacy” as a couple, and cited shifts in feelings of acceptance by others and sometimes even within themselves. The impact of homophobia and marginalization was clear and profound: some of these couples had been together over twenty years and still reported deeply layered meanings of becoming legally married. While same-sex couples, like opposite-sex couples, may choose not to legally marry, the fact that they have the opportunity to do so and gain both social and legal benefits can clearly increase their perceived status as equal members of society.

Conclusion

The availability of legal marriage provides sanction for intimate relationships, whether or not a given couple chooses to marry. When legal marriage is available to same-sex couples, the ramifications of marrying stretch far beyond the couples themselves. Families, co-workers, and societal institutions’ perceptions of same-sex individuals and couples can shift towards greater acceptance. As such, homophobia in our society may be reduced.

Further analyses of these data are currently being conducted examining variation in our present findings that might be accounted for by participants’ various ethnic, gender and cultural dynamics, further exploring normative stages in gay/lesbian relationship development, and studying the bi-directional impacts of homophobia and the decision and outcomes of legal marriage for same-sex couples and their families.

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**“Goin’ to the Chapel?”:
Same-Sex Couples’ Religious/Spiritual
Perspectives on Legalized Marriage**

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Introduction and Background

In the United States, the right to marry is conferred by individual states, making marriage a fundamentally civil institution. However, religion and/or spirituality play a significant role for many couples. Religious traditions have historically enforced marriage norms and have defined the parameters of legitimate intimate partnerships. Given the strong public positions taken by some religious traditions on homosexuality, the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts represents an important historical opportunity to examine if and how lesbian and gay couples view marriage through a religious and/or spiritual lens.

Various aspects of the “faith factor” (Matthews, Larson & Barry, 1993) have been examined in psychological research, ranging from the descriptive (e.g., denominational preference) and behavioral (e.g., level of participation) to more internalized aspects such as religiosity, spirituality, the importance of religion in one’s life, religious commitment, and orthodoxy. Throughout the paper we use the combined term religion/spirituality when we intend to be all-encompassing, and we distinguish between religion and spirituality when such differentiation is necessary, with “religion” referring to organized institutional affiliation with a particular faith tradition and “spirituality” referring to individual beliefs and practices.

Mary Gage Davidson (2000) has called attention to the disconnect between the “historical oppression of traditional religion” and the active religious participation of many lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. Not surprisingly, this historical reality of oppression has framed much of our examination of the religious/spiritual lives of LGB

people. For example, Kelly Shuck and Becky Liddle (2001) have identified five forms of resolution for those experiencing conflict between their sexual and religious identities: identifying as spiritual and not religious, taking a more flexible view of religious teachings, changing affiliations, maintaining one’s identity but not participating in formal religion, and disavowing formal religion. Adopting a more developmental perspective, Davidson (2000) and others describe a possible progression in which lesbians and gay men move from first denying oppression by formal religion, to understanding the losses caused by the oppression, mourning those losses, and then integrating their sexual and religious/spiritual identities.

In this Wellesley Centers for Women Working Paper, we examine if and how participants in an exploratory study of same-sex marriage view the legalization of marriage through a religious and/or spiritual lens.

Methods

Data for the current paper come from in-depth interviews conducted with both members of 47 same-sex couples in Massachusetts (n = 94). (Although 50 couples were interviewed, the analysis was conducted before transcripts of all interviews had been prepared.) The interview protocol entailed in-person individual interviews held separately with each member of the couple, joint interviews with both members of the couple, and self-administered questionnaires completed separately by each individual (n = 100). Additional information on the general design of this study and general sample descriptives are provided elsewhere in this paper series (see Purvin, Porche, & Waddell, this collection).

Consistent with the multi-faceted approach to studying religion/spirituality (Matthews et al., 1993), we asked participants a variety of questions in the individual interviews, the couple interviews, and the written questionnaires. Table 1 shows these questions and participants’ responses.

Data Analysis

Written transcripts were prepared from digital audio recordings and were analyzed using Atlas.TI software. In a first round of data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994), a larger team of trained researchers identified all references to religion and/or spirituality in the transcripts. The authors then analyzed these data following three steps described by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990), paying particular attention to passages in which participants connected their religious/spiritual beliefs or practices to how they experienced the legalization of same-sex marriage.

First, the authors identified units of meaning or “concepts” (e.g., marriage ceremony as a way to legitimize relationship, support/non-support of parents, influence of religion on marriage debate). Next, concepts were combined with similar concepts and placed into higher-order “categories” (e.g., ritual and ceremony, family of origin, conflation of religious and civil marriage). In a third step, data analysis revealed that participants described their experiences at multiple levels ranging from proximal to more distal levels of influence, consistent with the social-ecological tradition of nested spheres of influence (e.g., micro, exo, and macro) on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Thus, following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) definition of axial coding in which data are “put back together in new ways,” we organized the data into the framework described below.

Results

As participants described how they experienced the legalization of same-sex marriage, *multiple levels of religion and spirituality* were invoked ranging from the proximal to the more distal. Religion/spirituality was important at: the individual and couple level, the family and/or community (micro-) level, the (exo-) level of institutionalized religion, and at the larger cultural (macro-) level. Similarly, participants described their *experience of the legalization of marriage at multiple levels* ranging from

the proximal to distal. For example, participants talked about the creation of individual marriage ceremonies, their decision-making about whether to enter the institution of legal marriage, and their beliefs about legal marriage as a social or cultural institution.

Of particular importance, in the aggregate (i.e., not for every participating couple) each of these multiple levels of religion/spirituality intersected with each level of the experience of legal marriage. Figure 1 illustrates this finding in a 3x3 matrix, in which each column represents a level of religion/spirituality and each row going across represents a level of the experience of legalization. Each of these columns and their intersections with the various levels of the experience of legal marriage will be described in turn. The cells in the matrix are numbered to facilitate their description.

Individual-Level and Couple-Level Religion/Spirituality

Individual- and couple-level religion and/or spirituality most typically intersected with the *creation of individual marriage ceremonies* (cell 1) in decisions to include or not include religious/spiritual elements in the ceremonies. (NB: Evidence for this intersection comes solely from those participants who had chosen to legally wed.) For example, couples described lighting candles for absent or deceased parents, including scripture readings and various forms of blessings, and incorporating various ritual traditions, such as the Jewish chuppah. Other couples chose not to include religious elements (e.g., “there was no invocation of God”), yet some of these couples mentioned that they experienced as spiritual the sense of community and support from people attending the wedding. Another couple described wanting to emphasize the civil aspects of their wedding, having “already had our church thing [commitment ceremony] way back.”

Individual- and couple-level religion/spirituality less frequently intersected with *decisions about entering the institution of marriage* (cell 2), but some connections were voiced. For example, one woman (Claudia, White, not married, 4-year relationship) indicated that a marriage with her partner would be “too, like, spiritual and that’s not where we are right now.” With regard to this level of religion/spirituality intersecting with beliefs about *legal marriage as a social institution* (cell 3), one participant (Josh, White, married, 22-year relationship) described how the legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts connected with his “religion and spirituality” as a social justice issue, because “increased tolerance ... is part of our moving the world toward something better.”

Family- and Community-Level Religion

The intersection of the micro-level of family and community religion with the *creation of individual marriage ceremonies* (cell 4) took a variety of forms. For some couples, this intersection was one of conflict, with family members not attending weddings for religious reasons or even not responding to invitations. Other couples included religious traditions from their (at times dissimilar) upbringings as a way to strengthen relations with families of origin. For one woman, this served to emphasize commonality over difference:

Karen (White, married, 7-year relationship):
It was very meaningful to me to have a ... traditional Jewish wedding in a very non-traditional, obviously, setting and to have a lot of the same rituals that my [heterosexual] brother and sister had.

For another, having a wedding ceremony in a synagogue (interestingly, in a Conservative Jewish synagogue but performed by a Conservative rabbi supportive of same-sex marriage) brought her parents and her partner’s parents closer together:

Judy (White, married, 12-year relationship):
Something really shifted between [them] really seeing each other as in-laws and ... there’s actually a term in Yiddish ... when you get married ... in-laws become ... family ... that shift happened.

Other couples described how the inclusion of religious traditions and symbols, the use of religious buildings, and the presence of ministers or rabbis was important for family members, friends, and community members who attended their ceremonies. As one woman said:

Ada (White, married, 5-year relationship):
We did have a ... minister do the ceremony ... when we were still trying to really justify that this is a wedding and in order for it to feel that way to a lot of the people who were there, there needed to be an officiant who ... had credibility.

Church communities also played a role in couples’ marriage ceremonies. Some participants talked about the support they received from congregations to which they belonged, with one woman (Ariana, White, married, 15-year relationship) reporting that when she and her spouse announced their marriage: “We stood up in church and everybody ... applauded.” However, even congregations affiliated with supportive faith traditions were not always supportive of couples -- one couple reported that they withdrew from a congregation because of tepid support for their ceremony.

Religion at the family- and community-level also exerted a good deal of influence on *decisions about entering the institution of marriage* (cell 5), overwhelmingly in a negative direction among those who grew up in faith traditions unsupportive of same-sex marriage. For some couples, it was the potential pain of family members refusing to attend a wedding ceremony that influenced decisions not to marry, for others it was an unwillingness to cause tension in the family, and for one participant

(Maisey, White, not married, 7-year relationship) it was a reluctance to take such a serious step without the support of her mother, who cannot “reconcile” same-sex marriage with “the teachings of the [Catholic] faith.”

Religion at this micro-level did not intersect very frequently with participants’ *beliefs about legal marriage as a social institution* (cell 6), yet there were some participants who connected their beliefs about marriage equality to having grown up in faith traditions historically supportive of same-sex marriages, such as Unitarian Universalism (“it was never something that couldn’t be done”). Others’ beliefs about marriage equality, not surprisingly, were in conflict with those of family members aligned with non-supportive traditions.

Institutional- and Cultural-Level Religion

One obvious intersection between this most distal level of religion and the *creation of individual marriage ceremonies* (cell 7) was that faith traditions’ support or lack of support for same-sex marriage determined where couples could / could not have wedding ceremonies. Another intersection came in the form of participants’ dealings with religious leaders from various traditions. Some couples talked about religious leaders who were personally supportive of same-sex marriage but who couldn’t perform ceremonies because they were official representatives of non-supportive faith traditions, while others described the important support of leaders in more supportive traditions. However, one couple described how a very supportive leader was perhaps over-enthusiastic about performing their ceremony and brought it to a level of politicization with which they were not comfortable. Another participant (Aaron, White, married, 16-year relationship) described how his rabbi did not officiate at his wedding on the basis of it being an “interfaith thing,” but he viewed that explanation as “hogwash” and as masking “just another form of homophobia.”

Religion at these institutional and more macro cultural levels exerted a good deal of influence on participants’ *decisions about entering the institution of marriage* (cell 8). One woman, for example, described religion as being one of the things holding her back from getting married:

Frida (African-American, not married, 3-year relationship): *We would like to do it in a church ... [but] every time I’m in a church as a lesbian ... just feeling that I’m not welcome. I wouldn’t be welcome to get married in that church.*

Others found marriage as an institution too religious and decided against it for that reason. One participant (Eine, White, lesbian, not married, 40-year relationship) said: “Basically what ... we’ve come to is, forget about the marriage thing, it’s a religious issue.” Another woman (Carol, White, not married, 2-year relationship) said, “When I think of cons [for getting married] I think of religion ... because I think of being ... raised to get married in the Catholic church,” which she is unable to do. Yet not everyone reported being influenced by religion. The above woman’s partner (Amelia, White, not married, 2-year relationship) said, “that’s not a con for me though. I don’t associate marriage with religion, in any way.” Another participant (Jenny, White, not married, 11-year relationship) said, “I have no patience for religion right now and I don’t really care whether they think I should get married.”

This notion of the separation (or the lack thereof) between religious and civil marriage was a predominant theme of intersection between the more *distal levels of the experience of religion and legal same-sex marriage* (cell 9). In fact, this was the most salient theme in all the data on religion/spirituality in this study, voiced in statements such as:

Rebecca (White, married, 13-year relationship): *I don’t think religion ... and the state need to be anywhere near each other.*

Alice (White, not married, 3-year relationship): *[In] marriage ... there is this religious thing and this legal thing that are all tangled together which don't belong tangled together.*

Mark (White, married, 22-year relationship): *This is civil marriage, period. It's a legal thing.*

At a more macro-level beyond the exo-level of institutional religion, one woman remarked:

Frida (African-American, not married, 3-year relationship): *Our stance is ... damn it! Separation of church and state. ... Defining marriage between a man and a woman ... [is] a biblical interpretation. It's the bible. It's the bible. That's the thing that just drives us crazy.*

Of note, this separation theme was invoked by those who had and those who had not become legally wed, and by those who identified with a faith tradition and those who did not. In discussing the need for separation, several couples outlined an ideal model in which civil marriage is everyone's right, but faith traditions could choose to sanction or not and couples could choose to include religion or not.

Conclusions

The intersections depicted in this paper between religion and/or spirituality (at multiple levels) and legal same-sex marriage (at multiple levels) create a highly complex picture, suggesting an important direction for theory and practice. These qualitative data make clear that it is insufficient to assess (whether for clinical or research purposes) only individual-level constructs such as how people identify with regard to religion and/or spirituality or how much they participate in religious institutions. We also need to evaluate how they may be influenced – positively or negatively – by

extended family, religious communities, institutional religion, and the larger culture.

This complexity, however, should not obfuscate a very simple bottom line: the experience of legalized same-sex marriage is influenced by religion, even among people who do not describe themselves as “religious” or “spiritual.” Indeed, perhaps the most important finding of this paper is the extent to which religion influenced marriage decision-making in a negative direction for many couples. While we might expect this at the level of institutional religion among people identified with non-supportive traditions, it was also the case at the family and larger cultural levels, and among people who did not identify or affiliate with a faith tradition. Similarly, the separation – or lack thereof – of civil marriage and religious marriage was a *major* concern among the study participants, whether married or not and whether identified / affiliated or not.

Our findings also inform psychology's traditional examination of the negative aspects of religion in the lives of LGB individuals. A focus on the negative aspects of religion is of course appropriate, but only to a point. Conflict, guilt, and fragmentation are very real elements in the lives of many LGB people, but we also need to hear the experiences of acceptance, support, validation, and integration that arise as people interact with religious traditions. These positive aspects came about through participants' involvement with faith traditions that are supportive of same-sex relationships and marriage (e.g., Unitarian Universalism, United Church of Christ / Congregationalism, Reform Judaism) and also through their involvement with supportive movements within non-supportive traditions, such as the Dignity movement within Roman Catholicism. These findings are perhaps best viewed against the backdrop of the disconnect between “supply and demand” – between the desire for many LGB individuals to have religion and spirituality in their lives and in their marriages, and the relatively short supply of faith traditions that welcome such individuals.

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Table 1. Distribution of Religion/Spirituality Responses

Question Description	Percentage
Current religious affiliation (open-ended) (n = 91)	
No identification	29%
Jewish	22%
Unitarian Universalist	14%
Specific beliefs, but unaffiliated with faith tradition	10%
Episcopal/Anglican	10%
Catholic	10%
Protestant	5%
Current approach to religion or spirituality (n = 90)	
No involvement	21%
Mostly private	32%
Mix of private and formal	20%
Active participation in formal congregation/community	27%
Raised with religious affiliation (n = 86)	
Yes	81%
No	19%
If yes, currently participating in same tradition (n = 70)	
Yes	27%
No	73%
If currently participate, how supportive tradition is of same-sex marriage (n = 51)	
unsupportive at national and local levels	4%
unsupportive nationally, supportive locally	10%
no public position but locally supportive	8%
supportive nationally and locally	80%
Importance of that support to personal life/decisions about marriage (n = 70)	
not at all important	43%
somewhat important	19%
very important	16%
extremely important	23%

Figure 1. Intersection of Multiple Levels of Religion/Spirituality with Multiple Levels of the Experience of the Legal Marriage

		Levels of Religion/Spirituality		
		Individual and Couple Level	Family and Community Level (Micro)	Institutional/Cultural Level (Exo, Macro)
Levels of the Experience of Legal Marriage	Marriage Ceremonies	1	4	7
	Decisions About Entering Institution of Marriage	2	5	8
	Beliefs About Marriage As Social/Cultural Institution	3	6	9

“These Are My Parents:” The Experiences of Children in Same-Sex-Parented Families During the First Year of Marriage Legalization in Massachusetts

Georgia Hall, Ph.D.

Introduction

The perspectives and experiences of children in same-sex parented families on the legalization of same-sex marriage is an important topic for research. This paper was prepared using the data from the larger “An Exploratory Study of Same-Sex Marriage” conducted by the Wellesley Centers for Women. Data for this paper come from interviews with parents and children and youth in same-sex families. In this paper I made use of two sources of information: (1) direct testimony from children on their perceptions of same-sex marriage; and (2) testimony from parents regarding the influence of parenting on their choice to participate in legal marriage, and parents’ perceptions of the impact of legal marriage on their children or anticipated children.

Initial findings suggest that the presence or anticipation of children in a same-sex parented family can be a primary influence on parent participation in legal marriage. Also, the ways children experience and talk about the legalization of same-sex marriage offers valuable insight into their perspectives on family life, parent relationships, and the acceptance of their families in the broader community.

Background

Much of the research concerning children of same-sex parents has focused on their mental health and behavioral functioning and on children’s development within that family context. Research indicates that the sexual orientation of parents does not predict the health of their

children’s psychological, emotional, or behavioral development (Fitzgerald, 1999; Lambert, 2005; Mooney-Somers & Golombok, 2000; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Lesbian and heterosexual families have not been shown to differ in the proportion of children presenting psychiatric disorders or abnormal levels of problem behavior (such as hyperactivity, conduct, or emotional problems) (Golombok et al., 2003). Having lesbian parents has not been shown to affect overall psychological adjustment and lesbian families have demonstrated the same levels of warmth, emotional involvement, and overall parenting quality that are seen in heterosexual families (Golombok et al., 2003; Wainright et al., 2004).

Research which points to the “normalcy” of children raised in gay and lesbian families certainly makes a valuable contribution to scientific knowledge, but it runs the risk of minimizing the significance of the different experiences and perspectives of these children. Because this research compares two groups of children (those with gay and lesbian parents and those with heterosexual parents) on established developmental outcomes, it fails to consider important perspectives that may be uniquely relevant to children of same-sex parents. These children may in fact have very different perspectives and understandings related to family development, parent relationships, and marriage.

Children’s attitude toward marriage and family are widely assumed to be influenced by childhood experiences within the families they grow up. Values are communicated through the family as are models for marriage and family living (Coleman & Ganong, 1984; Heiss, 1972; Hill & Aldous, 1969; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Landis, 1962; Pope & Mueller, 1976; Rose, 1955; Stinnett, 1969; Wallin, 1954; Walters, Parker, & Stinnett, 1972). Many researchers (Fox & Inazu, 1982; Landis, 1962; Marotz-Baden, Adams, Gueche, Munro & Munro, 1979; Raschke & Raschke, 1979; Walling, 1954; Wilson, Zurcher, McAdams & Curtin, 1975) have suggested that a model of family structure is not sufficient to explain children’s attitude toward

marriage and family. Equal consideration must be given to the nature of interpersonal relationships within the family (Spreitzer & Riley, 1974). Bandura's social learning theory is offered as theoretical support for these findings. Accordingly, happy intact parental relationships are assumed to present positive modeling (Coleman & Ganong, 1984).

There is sparse literature which explores the perceptions of heterosexually parented children (two parents in the home) on marriage and parenting relationships because much of the most current literature about children's perception of marriage primarily has focused on the impact and psychological symptoms of divorce. The divorce literature has little relevance to understanding how children in same-sex parented families may feel about parental relationships and family structure in comparison to children in heterosexually parented families.

Recent personal accounts in such books as "Families Like Mine: Children of Gay and Lesbian Parents Tell It Like It Is" (Gardner, 2004) and "How It Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent" (Snow, 2004) reflect some of the painfully alienating and isolating realities for children with same-sex parents. Eliciting children's perspectives within the context of the 2004 legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts presents a particularly fertile domain for investigating and broadening our understanding of the lived experience of these children as related to parenting relationships and family development.

Sample

Fourteen couples in the "Same-Sex Marriage" study reported having children. There were 27 children among the couples with an average child age of 13 years. The majority of the children were biological children of one of the members of the couple and in most cases the other member had adopted the child. Some of the children were adopted or living with a couple in foster care. The couples with children had been together as partners for an average of 13 years.

Results

Children's Perception of Parent Relationships

Children in same-sex parented families did not express any discomfort or awkwardness in talking about their parent relationships and family structures. For most of the children who grew up in gay or lesbian families, their family structures seemed "ordinary" to them. Additionally, many of the families reside in Boston communities that have instituted school and community protections and supports for children of all types of families. While not understating the real prejudice towards same-sex parented families that still takes place, many children in the sample seem to feel secure and supported by the positive and accepting environments in which they go to school, socialize, etc.

It is interesting to note the different experiences of one child entering into a lesbian parented family as an adolescent compared to a child being born into such a household. As an adult child of a lesbian couple, John recalls the difficulty he first had when his mom came out.

John (age 28): My mom came out to me, probably when I was eight or nine, or maybe a year or two younger, it was something very unheard of to me at that point in my life. And maybe a little ashamed of, but as I - you know, I mean they have been together for fifteen years now, it's not something that umm someone should be scared of or ashamed of.

While another child, Ellie, who was born into a lesbian-parented household relates an experience when peers challenged her family structure. Ellie's original lesbian parents separated, so she is parented by each of these parents along with their new partners. She is both confident and resourceful in her response to such confrontations.

Ellie (age 8): *Just because I have four parents, people say like-if I tell them I have four parents, they say, 'You can't have four parents. Four parents is against the law.' It might be against the law where they came from because a lot of people moved so they were new in our school this year . . .*

I threatened to bring in pictures of all the stuff just to be proof. Cause if someone - if I have some kind of proof on something and someone criticizes me about it or anything like that, I'll threaten to bring in proof. And if they say, 'I don't believe you. Bring in the proof.' I'll bring in the proof and then tell them they're wrong.

The children use a variety of terms to refer to their parents including calling one mother “Mama” and the other “Mommy.” Cultural terms such as “Mit-Mom” are also used. One child uses “Mommy” for both parents unless needing to specify. Another set of children (adopted) with two male parents use their parents’ first names when talking with their parents, but use “Dad” or “my guardian” when talking with others. Children were in general comfortable with the language they had acquired to talk about their families. Awkwardness and discomfort seem to arise in settings outside of the home, when terms need to be reconciled against more narrow interpretations.

Children's Perception of Gay Marriage

Although a limited number of interviews were conducted with children of same-sex couples, the findings suggest that children experience the *event* of same-sex marriage in ways very different from their parents. Even though many children talked enthusiastically about their roles in the ceremonies and readily justified the right of their parents to legally marry, children of couples participating in legal marriage ceremonies seemed more likely to view the marriage as meaningful or important to their *parents* than to them.

The distinction between perception of the marriage ceremony itself and the justification for legal marriage is an important line to draw. Most of the children interviewed were keenly aware of the controversy around the issue of same-sex marriage. Several of the children had been included in advocacy events. Questions about the “rightness” of legalizing same-sex marriage drew much more animated response from children, than testimony about the significance of the actual marriage ceremony. The granting of equal marriage rights to same-sex couples seemed as potent an issue to children as to their parents.

Ellie has to cope with peers who are not supportive of same-sex marriage while Tracy finds her peer group to be very enthusiastic, and in talking about the same-sex marriage ruling, easily articulates an equality argument supporting gay marriage.

Ellie (age 8): *Before they knew me they were telling me, 'Do you think same sex marriage is cool?' And I said like, 'I don't know. It's okay.' And they said, 'Really? It's totally uncool. I mean like you have to be just a man and a woman.' This really annoys me because my best friend also has two moms.*

Tracy (age 13): *I think it's awesome. I think it's about time that they finally let gays- gays and lesbians finally get married 'cause they're just people and it's like, they have a right too. Like, there's nothing bad about them; there's no difference. They're human beings like everyone else. Why should they be treated differently? I kind of look at it like the whole racist against Black thing - I kind of compare it with that. Well, they're people too. They have their rights. Why not gays and lesbians, you know? It's like, they're just people. There's nothing different so...it's actually good. I really think - and all my friends think it's awesome too.*

While same-sex couples appear to attach great significance to the marriage ceremony itself (see Schecter et al. and Noonan & Senghas in this collection), children were less likely to report it as a particularly consequential event.

Frank is the biological son of Karen and has lived with Karen and her partner for 11 years. The rabbi who barmitsvahed Frank performed the wedding ceremony for his parents in their backyard garden. Frank's testimony suggests that he is ambivalent about the event. He recalls that he enjoyed the party because he was able to invite several friends. In talking about the ceremony, Frank attaches meaning more to his parents' experience than his own.

Frank (age 15): *Yeah it had meaning because I knew that it was a big - a big deal to them. So it was just nice because they wanted it pretty bad.*

Frank explains that he expected his parents would take advantage of legal marriage and understands the significance of the legal shift.

Frank (age 15): *It felt like a given that they were going to get married... [the day was] happy, curious, like ground-breaking.*

An adult child, John explains that he had already considered his two moms married because of an earlier commitment ceremony. So the legal wedding represented a gesture that added public recognition of the couple's relationship which was important to them, but didn't necessarily change anything for him.

Interviewer: *Has your mother getting legally married made a difference in your life?*

John (age 28): *It makes me happy for them that they're legally recognized. I mean I've always thought of Diane as*

a part of my family. So...yeah. It has. I think more for them than for me though. I mean for me I've always consider, considered them married after they closed the union 10 years ago but for them to be recognized as a legal couple I think in that way it has made more of a difference. . . for them.

Echoing John's comments, Zeke speaks about the importance of the event but locates meaning in the parents' experiences rather than sensing any shift or meaning for himself. Zeke also recalls an earlier commitment ceremony which evidently already sealed his parents' relationship for him.

Zeke (age 12): *Well, so mom and mit-mom got married and then - I'm not really sure what they did because they always say like it's better and they - it's better for them. But I don't really see any differences. I don't really know, like the difference that much. Well I know there was something important but I just don't - I just don't know the difference between like being married and not . . . because for me it's like the same . . . because they had also they had a ceremony before that. And so . . . in my mind, they were like almost married already so that's why they actually getting married didn't seem like that much.*

Aaron (age 10) and Tracy are brother and sister and were adopted by two gay men. Tracy is very excited to participate in her parents' marriage ceremony partly because of her role as flower girl. Tracy mentions that some of her classmates are unaware that her two guardians are gay. So she is "outed" by the marriage talk and sometimes drawn into the discussion of a marriage ceremony because of the enthusiastic interest of her friends.

Tracy is captivated by the reactions of some of her peers to her parents' pending wedding. Her friends

are taken in by the historic and novel aspects of the occasion. Like other same-sex parented children in the study, the parents' legal wedding seems more significant for the adults than the child.

Tracy (age 13): *So all my friends were sitting at my table were like, so they're like, "Tracy, when are they gonna do it?" and were really into it. . . It's really cool because they're all saying what I was saying, like it's about time they finally did it. And so my friends were like, "Tracy, I'm so coming to the wedding," and I'm like, "Oh yeah, yeah."*

. . . some of my friends didn't know that they're gay, they're like "oh, they're gay?" I'm like, "Yeah. Didn't you know that?" and they're like, "No. They didn't seem gay." And I'm like, "Yeah, they don't have a big sign on them that says, 'Hey I'm gay.'"

Aaron was the ring bearer: I was kind of hoping he'd kind of trip and fall. That'd be really funny. It was really cool. I actually made a speech to them but I don't remember much about it . . . it was just a regular wedding. I've been in other weddings and it's just like the same. There's no difference in it. It didn't really change anything for me like 'cause I was already so used to living with them and stuff. It was like, "Oh, they're getting married. [sarcastically] Woo hoo!" It's like, of course, it was about time but it's like just didn't seem awkward; it was normal . . . now they can say they're like legalized in marriage or whatever or however you would say that and so I was like, it didn't really change anything in me, but like, I guess for them it changed some stuff but not really for me.

Children as an Influence toward Legal Marriage

Couples in the marriage study were asked to what degree did having or anticipating children influence their decision to get legally married. All of the couples in the study with children had been legally married. The overwhelming majority of couples considered the presence or anticipation of children as a strong influence on their decision to be legally married. The nature of influence on the decision to get married varied among couples.

Some couples cited the importance of securing particular rights and protections that were associated with marriage that may otherwise have to be acquired by filing various legal documents, such as adoption papers or health care proxies. Having or anticipating children prompted couples to think about how to best secure legal protections for children. Many of these couples indicated that they would participate in legal marriage without children; however, the presence or anticipation of children seemed to inspire greater interest and more immediate timing.

Mia (Asian, married, 5-year relationship): *We think that being legally married is very important because we're having a child. So, I mean, it's the timing- I think all along we've been thinking that we want legal marriage because it's important to our family to keep our family safe and protected and all that sort of stuff. So, we're just really happy that it exists now given that we're having a child.*

Ada (White, married, 5-year relationship): *I think we would have been legally married no matter what. I think, I mean... it works out really, really nicely because I wasn't going to wait to have a child 'til I could get married, but it's ideal to bring a child into a marriage instead of bringing him*

into something much more abstract that's harder to define.

Juncos (Puerto Rican, married, 7-year relationship): *One major concern that we have had since we decided to explore the possibility of becoming parents is what are the legal protections out there for our future kids? And we drafted legal documents and so forth. But then when the possibility of marriage came along, we were like, you know we're willing to embrace this because this is what, in society, usually protects kids.*

Judy (White, married, 12-year relationship): *I mean it made it a no-brainer. I mean it felt like having kids, any - any way we can increase our legal connections is only good for our family. So it was - I mean even though, as you know, it seems like we, you know, we are ambivalent or we weren't sure we were going to get married but it felt like with kids it just - we had to do this.*

Although couples were clear that legal marriage was a route to more protections, they still had many questions about the extent of parenting rights by virtue of marriage and the transferability of any rights outside of Massachusetts.

Claudia (White, not married, 4-year relationship): *But even if you do have children and you got married within that window or maybe in Mass state but it's not federally recognized. I mean - it seems like - I mean it's not going to - there - I don't know the precedence and the law aren't going to work the same way they have with other things because it's such a - going to be such a small set of people who got married. And then there's like a test case and, you*

know, what if we're not even living in Massachusetts and we're not planning on living in Massachusetts. So what is it going to mean?

Other couples were influenced by the "legitimacy" that legal marriage brought to their relationship as particularly related to their children's perceptions. Many of the couples in the study had already participated in previous spiritual or commitment ceremonies. These participants affirmed that they already felt "married." While the legal ceremony was important for the support it offered to children, it didn't necessarily change the couples' perception of their relationship. Some couples anticipated that having a "marriage ceremony" may alter the children's perception of the parent's relationship as having become more "mainstream" and "permanent." One participant mentioned the importance of children being able to speak about their parents as "married."

Linda (White, married, 24-year relationship): *In the spiritual sense of marriage, we've always considered ourselves married. So whether or not we felt the need to have that legal document, we probably would have just because it was the health aspect and the access. I think we probably did, but certainly having the children made it so critical and so important.*

Carol and Amelia (both White and married to each other, 2-year relationship): *When we consider though having a family and coming together, I think marriage becomes even more important for me or for us in terms of legalizing our relationship . . . having us both be legal parents. . . when I think of family, I think of two parents married. I would want a child to think of us as two parents that are married.*

Zelda (White, married, 3-year relationship): *I think it gave my three children another layer of security. And they were very approving and very proud of us. They thought it was cool, awesome. But I also think they liked it in terms of the permanency. 'Cause they knew what they had to deal with. They knew - they knew what to expect from themselves about their relationship with Susan. They knew how to - it was another layer of knowing that she wasn't temporary and this was going to be a person in their life. This is a person to continue to develop a relationship with.*

Dee (White, married, 6-year relationship): *I heard Hillary Goodridge speak several years [ago] and she talked about the - one of the motivating things for them was talking to their daughter and saying that people, when two people love each other they get married and their daughter said, "Why aren't you married?" And I thought, I mean, he wasn't even born at the time that I heard that and I thought - oh I'm going to cry right now - you know, what a horrible thing to have to explain to a child, like why your parents can't be married, if they want to. So I think for me, that was a big part of doing it and that's what I hope - I mean, I hope it will make a difference in his life and the fact that he'll never have to ask that question.*

Mia and Ada are a couple who have been together for 5 years. Ada was pregnant at the time of the interview with the couple's first child. Each of the women expressed that the opportunity to legally marry would take some of the stress and pressure out of giving birth and provide a legal structure to "lean on." For them the acquisition of legal marriage solidified the family relationship to others in the broader community. They cited the task of advocating for children in schools and medical

offices and how obtaining legal status through marriage afforded them new leverage in negotiating and advocacy circumstances.

Ada (White, married, 5-year relationship): *If we didn't have a legal marriage, I would feel like I was constantly on the defensive about what should I do, how I should do it and... And instead I'm able to take a much more assertive stance and be able to advocate for the family in a way I didn't feel like I could have before, because I didn't have anything behind me to do it.*

So, for example, the birth certificate form is not changed yet. So in order to fill it out, I have to fill out 'Mother' and 'Father' information. There's no like 'Second Parent' information. And it gets very confusing because the baby has a donor, and those are the questions that are relevant to biology, but he also has another parent. So that's the kind of example where I had no qualms about calling Boston where they handle the whole documentation piece and saying "What are you going to do about this? I'm married. I'm having a baby. The form doesn't work. So what do we do?" So in that kind of thing, I am more assertively out in those advocacy roles.

Mia (Asian, married, 5-year relationship): *Because I think when you're dealing with teachers and when you're dealing with doctors, and when you're dealing with all the people a child brings into your life, you know, day care providers.... With all those people it's kind of important to set the tone that there's a legal relationship here that is required that you honor it.*

Couples also spoke about how they believed participating in legal marriage impacted their

children's feelings. One parent reflected that having parents legally married would make her children feel "more comfortable." Another parent suggested that legal marriage can give a child a greater sense of "belonging." Few of the couples actually indicated that there were any extended discussions with the children about how the children would feel if their parents were to legally marry. A number of the children were probably too young to engage in such discussions. In general, parents perceived that their children were supportive of their intention to legally marry and could easily forecast numerous ways that the children would benefit.

Discussion

A number of observations emerge from the study analysis. First, the findings suggest that children find different meaning in the availability of same-sex marriage and the actual event of a same-sex marriage. To some extent children cast the event itself as "very ordinary." Findings from the larger "Same-sex Marriage Study" suggest the event is often deemed by couples to be quite "extraordinary" and symbolic of the acquisition of hard fought civil rights. Children are insistent that same-sex marriage is a necessary right that should be granted to same-sex couples, but upon having that right available do not necessarily attach importance to ceremony itself. To some extent, the "legal" marriage ceremony was less meaningful because most the couples had previously participated in a commitment ceremony, often in the presence of their children. The commitment ceremony supplanted any need for an additional ceremony to "legally" solidify the parent relationship since it was already solidified in the children's minds.

Same-sex parents articulate numerous advantages both for themselves and for their children in "getting married." Couples imagine that their children will feel a greater sense of belonging, pride, or permanence by having "legally married" parents. The study findings do not offer enough information to confirm whether these opinions are shared by children. However, in the limited number

of interviews conducted, such reactions did not surface.

It is interesting though to consider what social, political, and psychological forces may shape such differences in parent and child perspectives. More than likely, couples were raised in heterosexually parented families and bring forward those models of parent relationships in which they were raised. Thus having a "legal marriage" may be of more significance to the parent having been raised in the context of a "legal marriage" than a child who finds sufficient regularity in the parent relationship within which she/he is raised.

Social context also may contribute to differences in children's and parents' perspectives on "legal marriage." Most of the children had peers who also were members of same-sex parented families. Therefore not having "legally married" parents did not always translate into being an "outsider." Further studies may elicit whether the extent of immersion into supportive environments and social circles diminishes the need for participation in broadly held social norms.

The results also showed the strong influence having children or anticipating children had on many couples' decisions to legally marry. Couples consistently reported advantages, both tangible and intangible, established by legalizing their relationship. What is striking about these findings is the very clear identity of "marriage" as a protective factor for children and how that discussion is not likely to take place in the same way for heterosexual couples where marriage usually precedes children. The activist and emotional tone of parent testimony related to children suggests a deeply held anxiety and concern about fortifying and protecting their children's lives. There is a sense that same-sex parents see themselves as entering into the sphere of child-raising disadvantaged. The legalization of same-sex marriage presents an unprecedented opportunity to seize equal footing in advocating and providing stability for their children.

Our results point also to the delicate balance that children of same-sex parented families maintain between living as “no different” and “unique.” It is evident that this is an experience that same-sex parented children reconcile. They are frequently placed in contexts in which they may need to disclose their family structure, or in fact defend it. While they may see their parenting structure and

relationships as “normal,” contact with others challenges the normalcy of the model. Having legal marriage affords the official use of the label “married” to describe their parents’ relationship. Being able to use such a descriptor may be the kind of “evidence” that Ellie refers to in defending her family structure.

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Co-Chair's Comments

Connie Chan, Ph.D.

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I would like to thank Sumru Erkut and her colleagues for the opportunity to be a part of this important symposium and to hear about the work of the research group. The contribution of psychological research to the issue of same-sex marriage is a very important one. Psychology and APA Division 44, the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues, have made important contributions that have been applied to public policy, legislation, and legal decisions on lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues.

Today, we are focused on same-sex marriage, and the effects of same-sex marriages in the *one* state that has LEGALIZED it -- Massachusetts. The research that was just presented describes and analyzes various perspectives of same-sex marriage of lesbians and gay men and their children, reminding us of the diversity of the perspectives among a diverse group. It is important to remember that lesbians and gay men and their families and friends regard marriage in a range of ways – from wanting to be married for years, to not wanting to be married even after years of living together as a couple. When I listen to these findings I am struck by the importance of psychological research to our understanding, as mental health professionals and educators, of the institution of marriage and what marriage means in a relationship. It gives us an unprecedented, unique situation to study same-sex couples in marriage. It gives us, as researchers, a way to isolate the effects of gender and to examine the meanings, advantages, and disadvantages of marriage for individuals – as married woman and woman and married man and man – something we have never been able to do before. This is a remarkable contribution to the research literature on marriage and relationships.

I am reminded of another important contribution made by psychologists years ago in research on parenting and gender issues in parenting. When the lesbian and gay “baby boom” began 15-20 years ago, it gave us an opportunity to study parenting without the factor of gendered pairs. Looking at two mothers or two fathers, we were able to isolate the issues of parenting by examining the roles usually associated for the male or female parent and seeing how two mothers or two fathers negotiated these roles and tasks. The psychological research on lesbian and gay parenting conducted by Charlotte Patterson and other members of Division 44 has been instrumental in looking at the well-being of the children in lesbian and gay families. The research has often been cited in legal cases regarding custody and lesbian/gay parenting rights. When the baby boom first started, not one state allowed two women or two men to be the legal parents of a child. However, today, over 25 states allow lesbians and gay men to legally adopt children together as parents, and much of the legal arguments for these parental rights were based on psychological research of APA and Division 44 psychologists.

We are in a similar situation today with same-sex marriage. We have only one state that has legalized same-sex marriage, but in 15-20 years we could have many, perhaps even the majority. I look to you, the researchers who presented your work today, and to the audience, for the kind of research that demonstrates how the ability to marry contributes to the dignity and strength of relationships, and how that strengthens society as a whole. It is the kind of research that will be cited in legal cases and that will make a difference in future laws.

I have lived in Massachusetts for a long time and was proud that our state was the first to allow same-sex marriages. It was a time of celebration of our rights and our dignity. Yet, at the same time, it was a time of great difficulty and hatred towards gay men and lesbians and our relationships. A constitutional convention made up of the state legislature was held last spring that introduced an amendment to

ban same-sex marriages in Massachusetts. During the floor debate about the amendment, many legislators spoke passionately for and against same-sex marriages. Some legislators who became our heroes argued *against putting discrimination* into the state's constitution and *for the right* of lesbians and gay men to have their relationships validated and legalized. Other legislators were extremely negative, saying hateful things about why lesbian and gay relationships were not worthy of the status of marriage. It was the most exciting, exhilarating, and most discouraging time to be a gay man or lesbian, planning to marry and to celebrate while bombarded by legal and legislative challenges. It was not until three days before the first day when lesbians and gay men could apply for marriage licenses, on May 17, that the final challenge to the U.S. Supreme Court was denied. Weddings and travel arrangements had to be hastily organized and finalized within three days! But we had anticipated backlash -- many legal and legislative challenges -- because once same-sex marriages became a reality, the genie would be out of the bottle forever, and there would be equal rights for our relationships at last.

I would like to close with a statement from Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, after the Spanish parliament took its historic vote on August 12, 2005 legalizing both gay marriage and adoption of children by gay couples. He said,

We are not legislating, honorable members, for people far away and not known by us. We are enlarging the opportunity for happiness to our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends and, our families: at the same time we are making a more decent society, because a decent society is one that does not humiliate its members... Today, the Spanish society answers to a group of people who, during many years have, been humiliated, whose rights have been ignored, whose dignity has been offended, their identity denied, and their liberty oppressed. Today the Spanish society grants them the respect they deserve, recognizes their rights, restores their dignity, affirms their identity, and restores their liberty... With the approval of this Bill, our country takes another step in the path of liberty and tolerance that was begun by the democratic change of government. Our children will look at us incredulously if we tell them that many years ago, our mothers had fewer rights than our fathers, or if we tell them that people had to stay married against their will even though they were unable to share their lives. Today we can offer them a beautiful lesson: every right gained, each access to liberty has been the result of the struggle and sacrifice of many people that deserve our recognition and praise.

What a beautiful message. One day, I hope to hear our own president give the same message to our country.

Thank you.

Appendix A

List of the Study Group Members

The research project was initiated, planned, and executed by the study group whose members represent a broad cross-section WCW staff in a variety of disciplines and roles:

Ineke Ceder, Research Administrator and Project Associate;
Sumru Erkut, Senior Research Scientist and Associate Director (Social Psychology);
Georgia Hall, Research Scientist (Educational Psychology);
Amy Hoffman, Editor, *Women's Review of Books* (English Literature);
Erinn Horrigan, Website Manager (Geology);
Gloria Luong, NSF Summer Intern (Psychology);
Jean Murphy, Director of Pre-Award Services (Public Administration);
Anne Noonan, Research Scientist (Lifespan Developmental Psychology);
Konjit Page, Clinical Intern (Counseling Psychology);
Michelle Porche, Research Scientist (Human Development);
Diane Purvin, NICHD Postdoctoral Fellow (Social Policy);
Catherine Senghas, Deputy Director for Finance and Administration (Business);
Lisa Sankowski, Associate Director of Open Circle (Education);
Ellen Schechter, Postdoctoral Fellow, Stone Center (Clinical Psychology);
Joyce Shortt, Research Scientist (Education);
Allison Tracy, Methodologist (Human Development);
Jasmine Waddell, NICHD Postdoctoral Fellow (Social Policy);
Nancy Wechsler, Project Administrator;
Jodie Wennemer, Communications Assistant.

Additional expertise was provided by Jean Hardisty, Nicolene Hengen, Karen McCormack, Nancy Marshall, Jan Putnam, and Donna Tambascio.

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms Used⁴

LGBT community: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identifying people and the community that surrounds them including family, friends, and advocates.

DOMA: The federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA; 1996), defined conjugal rights and responsibilities as an entitlement for opposite-sex couples and empowered all states to honor this definition by providing all states the right to not recognize a same-sex marriage from another state.

Legal/Civil marriage: The legal union of two people. Once a couple is married, their rights and responsibilities toward one another concerning property and support are defined by the laws of the state in which they live. A legal marriage can only be terminated by a court granting a divorce or annulment.

Same-sex marriage: The term used to describe the union of two people of the same sex, same-sex unions are also referred to as 'gay marriage' and 'homosexual marriage.' Currently, the legal rights conferred to married same-sex couples are recognized only in Massachusetts.

Religious marriage: In virtually all religions, marriage is a long-term union between two people and is established with ceremonies and rituals. The two people are most commonly a man and a woman, though many societies have permitted polygamous marriages, and same-sex marriage is now acknowledged in some faith traditions.

Civil union: Civil union is a new category of law that was created to extend rights to same-sex couples. These rights are recognized only in the state where the couple resides – currently only in Vermont. Because civil union law is new, it is largely untested by the courts and is not widely understood.

Boston Marriage: A marriage-like relationships between women in 19th and early 20th century, that may or may not have a sexual component.

Harlem Marriage: In the 1920s Harlem was known for its gay and lesbian weddings, recognized by community members if not the state.

Mainstream: Hetero-normative orientation expressed by some members of the LGBT community under certain circumstances.

Lawrence v. TX (2003): U.S. Supreme Court set the groundwork for the marriage decision upholding the right to privacy for gays and lesbians by striking down existing sodomy laws defined by Bower v. Hardwick (1986), thus eliminating the definition of gay and lesbian sex as a crime.

DignityUSA: DignityUSA works for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.

Stonewall: For gay, lesbian, and bisexual activists, the word "Stonewall" signifies an important landmark in the struggle for gay rights. Most chroniclers of the gay rights movement trace the beginnings of the movement's militant phase to 1969 and New York's lower-Manhattan (largely gay-frequented) Stonewall Bar. There, for the first time on record, homosexual patrons fought back when Stonewall was raided one hot summer night by New York City policemen, who came hoping to arrest gay individuals for engaging in then illegal homosexual acts.

Endnotes

¹ The expert editing of Jean Murphy is gratefully acknowledged.

² Findings reported are based on data from 49 couples, as interview data for one couple was not recorded due to recording equipment malfunction.

³ The authors thank Lisa Sankowski, M.A., for invaluable insight into the topic of this paper.

⁴ The glossary of terms provided here are intended to clarify the present authors' usage; they are not meant to be authoritative definitions.