

Marriage, what is it good for?

By Jessica Bennett and Jesse Ellison, Newsweek

Every year around this time, the envelopes begin to arrive. Embossed curlicues on thick-stock, cream-colored paper ask for “the pleasure of our company” at “the union of,” “the celebration of,” or “the wedding of.” With every spring, our sighs get a little deeper as we anticipate another summer of rote ceremony, cocktail hour, and, finally, awkward dancing. Sure, some weddings are fun, but too often they’re a formulaic, overpriced, fraught rite of passage, marking entry into an institution that sociologists describe as “broken.”

Once upon a time, marriage made sense. It was how women ensured their financial security, got the fathers of their children to stick around, and gained access to a host of legal rights. But 40 years after the feminist movement established our rights in the workplace, a generation after the divorce rate peaked, and a decade after *Sex and the City* made singledom chic, marriage is—from a legal and practical standpoint, anyway—no longer necessary. The two of us are educated, young, urban professionals, committed to our careers, friendships, and, yes, our relationships. But we know that legally tying down those unions won’t make or break them. Women now constitute a majority of the workforce; we’re more educated, less religious, and living longer, with vacuum cleaners and washing machines to make domestic life easier. We’re also the breadwinners (or co-breadwinners) in two thirds of American families. In 2010, we know most spousal rights can be easily established outside of the law, and that Americans are cohabiting, happily, in record numbers. We have our own health care and 401(k)s and no longer need a marriage license to visit our partners in the hospital. For many of us, marriage doesn’t even mean a tax break.

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