

Old Maid No More¹

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Twenty years ago, women were being warned that, according to demographic research, if they didn't marry by the time they were in their early twenties, they would likely live out their lives unwed. As a child, I was even told that "those" women became "old maids," and I feared a similar fate. Fast-forward to 2006, and the news is quite different.

In a recent analysis of the 1986 report made famous in *Newsweek* magazine, renowned family historian Stephanie Coontz summarized how inaccurate those predictions turned out to be. According to Coontz, the good news for women (and the men who marry them) is that the average age of first marriage for women today is almost 26. For women with a college degree, it's 27 (Coontz, 2006). And even when women reach their middle years, they still marry: "More women now marry for the first time in their 40s, 50s, and even 60s than ever before in history" (Coontz, 2006, ¶ 6).

Another significant change in women's marriage trends is that for hundreds of years women who remained single to pursue higher education or a professional career were less likely to marry. For women born since 1960, this is no longer true. The women of this generation with advanced degrees are actually more likely to marry than women with low levels of education. Coontz explains that this change has come about as men are much more likely to marry women who are their intellectual and economic peers (Coontz, 2006).

Perhaps these new trends reflect that "For better or for worse" no longer includes the qualification of "...only if you're young"!

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To listen to the radio broadcast:

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/450.mp3

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/450.wav

Reference

Coontz, S. (2006, June 5). Three "rules" that don't apply [Electronic version]. *Newsweek*. Retrieved June 2, 2006, from <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/13006808/site/newsweek>.