The median age of women at time of first marriage in 2006 was 25.9 years old. In 1970, the median age of women at time of first marriage was 20.8 years old. It is important to look at the relationship between these two numbers in order to understand how our society may be changing in regards to marriage, arguably one of the strongest foundations of society.

The 1960’s and 70’s were the peak time for the women’s movement in the United States. It is significant that the median age of women at time of first marriage was still relatively young, only 20.8 years old (1). Women were just beginning to explore their individualism, sexual liberation and freedom to work. A new form of birth control “the pill”, gave women another option to postpone pregnancy. This allowed women to explore their sexuality, without having to commit to marriage (2). These changes prompted the deviation from the “June Cleaver” image of the 1950s housewife. As reflected in the numbers, women were about to start taking some time for themselves. It is important to bear in mind when looking at this number that these women were the daughters of the generation that fought in World War II. They were still feeling the pressure to marry young, whereas the current generation does not have the same type of national influence or pressure to marry at as early an age.

The 5.1 year increase in median age of women at time of first marriage in the last 36 years is significant because it shows that women are waiting longer to get married than in years past. This is most likely due to the fact that women are pursuing education more now than they used to. With the women’s movement of the 1960’s and 70’s came a
desire from women to move outside the home, to hold their own jobs and contribute to the household income. In current society, many college educated women are pursuing graduate and doctoral degrees in addition to their Bachelor’s degree. Attaining this level of education takes at least 4-8 years; during this time the individual may not be completely independent yet, perhaps still relying on their parents for money, or trying to pay off student loans. Getting married while still in school has gone out of fashion, which is a large explanation as to why the median age at time of first marriage for women has risen. It is important to notice however, that while the median age has risen, it is still relatively young. This shows us that while women may be taken more time for themselves to go to school or work before getting married, they are still marrying young enough to take advantage of their fertile years for having babies. This encourages us to believe that women do still value marriage and family, and recognize its importance to the function of society.
References

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