



To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change

Jessica Weiss

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Middle-class family life in the 1950s brings to mind images of either smugly satisfied or miserably repressed nuclear families with breadwinning husbands, children, and housewives, much like the families depicted in *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best*.

Jessica Weiss delves beneath these mythic images and paints a far more complex picture that reveals strong continuities between the baby boomers and their parents. Drawing on interviews with American couples from the 1950s to the 1980s, Weiss creates a dynamic portrait of family and social change in the postwar era. She pairs these firsthand accounts with a deft analysis of movies, television shows, magazines, and advice books from each decade, providing an unprecedented and intimate look at ordinary marriages in a time of sweeping cultural change.

Weiss shows how young couples in the 1950s attempted to combine egalitarian hopes with traditional gender roles. Middle-class women encouraged their husbands to become involved fathers. Midlife wives and mothers reshaped the labor force and the home by returning to work in the 1960s. And couples strove for fulfilling marriages as they dealt with the pressures of childrearing in the midst of the sexual and divorce revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s, they were far more welcoming to the ideas of the women's movement than has often been assumed. More than simply changing with the times, the parents of the baby boom contributed to changing times themselves.

Weiss's excellent use of family interviews that span three decades, her imaginative examination of popular culture, and her incisive conclusions make her book an invaluable contribution not only to our understanding of the past but also to our understanding of men's and women's roles in today's family.

"Weiss has written an enlightening book that examines the dynamics of American families past and present. . . . Since Weiss is a historian, she provides analyses of her arguments that are factual rather than emotive, and her use of family interviews further contributes to a strong presentation. Overall, this is a unique work because its multidisciplinary approach informs but never preaches on the emotionally charged topic of the American family.—Sheila Devaney, *Library Journal*

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