the economic situation of the casual labouring poor improved, making prostitution a less common option. While this economic improvement may have benefited women in some ways, Walkowitz maintains that female autonomy and female supportiveness decreased as higher wages "made men more viable as supporters of the family" (p. 92), thus isolating women in the home, and as the new values of respectability had a divisive effect on women's sense of community.

A Widening Sphere will certainly have a major influence on the study of Victorian women. The questions that can be raised about the editor's framework could be said to enhance, rather than limit, the value of the book. Like its predecessor, *Suffer and Be Still,* the questions that this volume raises will stimulate historians to investigate more fully many of the still unexplored aspects of Victorian women's history.

Deborah GORHAM,
Carleton University.

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Nancy F. COTT. — *The Bonds of Womanhood. "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977. Pp. 225.

In *The Bonds of Womanhood* Nancy F. Cott has set herself several purposes: to explain why a feminist of the 1830s would see womanhood as both constraint and opportunity, both bondage and bonding; to relate the cult of true womanhood to women's actual experience and consciousness; to evolve an interpretive framework for a future social history; and to examine "the social derivation of a concept of womanhood rooted in the experience of Yankee middle class mothers but applied to the female sex as a whole" (p. 17). In pursuit of these purposes Cott is consistently sensitive to the dual aspects of woman's role, as prescribed and as played, concluding that in the United States the cult of domesticity produced both the supportive doctrine of a separate "woman's sphere" and the equalitarian ideology of feminism. Her argument is impressive for its frequent and highly interesting suggestions about the historical experience of New England woman; but the generalizations often outrun the evidence presented, and are in part derived from a much simplified view of American society as a whole.

The diaries and correspondence of one hundred New England women, together with contemporary writings for or about women by ministers of religion, form the basis for Cott's argument. The diarists, white, middle-class, Protestant, of English descent but American birth, from both rural and urban backgrounds, and notably active rather than leisured, reveal an experience importantly conditioned by the rapid economic change of the years 1780-1835. That change broke down the earlier deferential social order with its varied ranges of superordination and subordination, replacing it by a society in which the only acceptable class definitions were the primary ones of sex, race, and acquired wealth. To the subordinate sex as its appropriate preserve was assigned the sphere of domestic activities, with their pre-industrial work patterns; and as men were drawn away into the new industrial marketplace, women became for the first time dominant within their own sphere. Their new responsibility, especially in the social training of children, elevated their role and justified a new education to prepare them for it; their concern for republican virtue in a changing world

made them the guardians not only of domestic morals but also of those of society at large; they were drawn into public reform movements through the agency of religious benevolent associations; and in their distinctive role, defined by gender and functioning both within and without the family, women shared in the common experience of their only true peer group, creating a new consciousness of sisterhood. It was this sisterhood which caused the majority of American women to accept their separate sphere, and at the same time provided the essential pre-condition for the emergence of an organized feminism which rejected it.

This summary outline does not do justice to the perception and sophistication of Cott's argument, which is very persuasive within its more limited focus on New England, middle-class, white women. Neither, however, does the outline do justice to some real weaknesses.

The evidence is thin. Generalizations based upon it, as for example that there was a uniquely high level of "marriage trauma" among early 19th-century women, with a probable "withdrawal of emotional intensity ... from the marital relationship" (pp. 80-81), remain tantalizing because insubstantial. Extrapolation from the New England experience to that of women as a whole, justified by Cott on the largely axiomatic grounds that New England had "the most influential regional culture" and the middle classes "cultural hegemony" (p. 10), is not convincing to those who observe a more complex American society marked by significant variables of region, class, and colour in its impact upon women. That wider historical context is presented in a disturbingly simple fashion — transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial society, breakdown in deference, ascendancy of democratic values — conferring on the nation a dubious uniformity which appears to establish a comparable uniformity in the social experience of women.

These criticisms Cott counters to some degree by explaining the limitations of her material, devoting a long footnote to the question of Southern women, and describing her work as an "essay" (p. 18), the basis for a more thorough history. But by consistently casting her argument in broad terms of its applicability to all women, she implicitly sets aside her own reservations.

Nevertheless, in its more precise focus *The Bonds of Womanhood* is a significant addition to an increasingly impressive historiography on 19th-century American women.

June I. Gow,
University of British Columbia.

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MARY ROTH WALSH. — *"Doctors Wanted: No Women Need Apply". Sexual Barriers in the Medical Profession, 1835-1975.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977. Pp. xxii, 303.

The 1960s and 1970s have introduced a whole new range of subjects to readers of history, perhaps no more so than in the history of women. The nineteenth century in particular has benefitted from new approaches. No longer focusing exclusively on the struggle for the vote, scholars everywhere are beginning to evaluate the interlocking structures of sexism and the evolution of sex-typing. American historians such as Mary Roth Walsh have been particularly prominent in this reassessment. The prevalence of medical arguments in the anti-feminist arsenal in the United States as elsewhere has drawn special attention to medicine