supportive evidence of her hopeful conclusion and, anyway, her handling of the issue in this wise only blurs it.

The danger to society from science does not arise from its internal dynamic of competition for recognition, accolade, and wealth. The true difficulty is precisely asexual; in a sense, altogether acultural. The trouble with science is its manifold capacity for putting sophisticated instruments of control, and destruction, into frail human hands made artificially and mechanically and administratively powerful by being coordinated, like science itself, into bureaucratic agencies which exist outside the influence and irrespective of the wishes of many ordinary citizens of both sexes. Atomic energy and biotechnology come immediately to mind, but cogent examples arise in many fields. The trouble with science is not sex. It is power.

This political and spiritual problem has been with us for a long time, and it may have very little, if anything, to do with the sexuality of scientists. Viewed from a more anxious perspective than Gornick’s, it may make little difference whether the scientific establishment is managed by men or women or both. There appears to be no scientific evidence that moral probity and social vision are the monopolies, or even the predominant traits, of either sex. As Gornick would understandably be among the first to acknowledge, power is as power does.

Leo J. Mahoney  
Bellflower, California


This is a historical survey of the American housewife and a very useful overview of her transition over time from dependence to independence. The survey proceeds from the Revolutionary War to 1986, using “diaries, letters, domestic fiction and household books of the past two centuries,” and marches from the 1776 married woman, who had no right to property unless she held it before marriage, to the “New Pioneers” of the 1980s.

The early chapters cover the “Manager” from 1776 to 1800, and the
“Lady,” 1800-1860, when there were no ready-made clothes and cheap domestic help was readily available. The next chapter describes “Saints & Sufferers,” 1860-1900, stifled by the velvet curtains and conservatism of the Victorian era. Then the “Pioneers,” 1870-1915, or housekeeping on the western frontier is explored. “From Scientist to Consumer,” 1900-1950, details the rise of scientific housekeeping and rural electrification. The “Rise and Fall of Supermother,” 1950-1970, chapter shows the emergence of the housewife into the workplace. The “Displaced Homemaker . . . ,” 1965-1975, charts the breakup of the family and the struggle over the ERA.

The last chapter, the “New Pioneers,” treats the older widows who were compelled by necessity to take a place in the work force; the single mothers, single by divorce or desertion; and the “double life wife,” who combined child rearing with a career. The author could have gone further with her new pioneers, to include the single mother who by choice is raising a fatherless child in a husbandless household. There are three-and-a-half pages on the New Pioneer father.

More emphasis could have been placed on the two factors which freed the housewife/mother to choose between bearing children or not bearing children, and to choose a life style as a single, living with a partner, or in marriage. Our peripatetic society has stilled the voice of Mrs. Grundy, our enforced conscience, and the pill has freed women from child bearing so they can concentrate on a career if that is their choice.

For those who wish to read further on the subject, the bibliographic essay gives the sources to four main areas of research: the housewife from a sociological point of view, from a political point of view, from a psychological point of view, and finally her own point of view as drawn from diaries, letters, oral histories, and interviews.

Helen M. Wilson
Historical Society of
Western Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania