Chapter 4 examines sterilization and the relationship among legal regulation, technology, and medical expertise. It begins with an exploration of the history and contemporary context of both voluntary and involuntary female sterilization, showing how, historically and into the present, women deemed unfit are in danger of involuntary sterilization while those deemed fit face barriers to accessing sterilization. The chapter argues that in both instances the women whose conduct would be regulated by experts are presumed to lack the ability to govern themselves properly. Using Butler’s performativity and Haraway’s cyborg theory, it argues that sterilization’s techno-medical intervention in the body holds the potential to subvert dominant notions of maternal desire and its connection to women’s presumed reproductive capacity. Such a subversion could enhance reproductive autonomy understood in terms of critique and transformation.

Chapter 5 revisits many of the themes of the book and investigates their broader import and applicability, exploring the ways in which notions of privacy and the public sphere are wielded in reproductive regulations.
Arguing that women’s bodies are sometimes presented as public spaces and are at other times privatized, it shows that these representations are connected to common understandings of autonomy. Another topic explored herein is how autonomy as critique and transformation could be used to promote reproductive justice projects. Chapter 5 also provides an overview of how each of the policy areas the book investigates would benefit from an approach anchored in the tradition of autonomy as critique and transformation. This overview is combined with a consideration of the limitations and potential of legal change and, in conclusion, an examination of the links between cyborg theory and transformative autonomy. The chapter argues that cyborg theory draws needed attention to the critical and transformative possibilities of non-reproductive technologies that play a crucial role in the management of reproduction.