At the stroke of midnight on January 2003, a baby born to a lesbian couple in Washington, D.C., became, to great media fanfare, the capital’s first newborn of the year. At the time of her arrival the baby’s mothers were moving their residence to a district where the nonbiological mother could legally adopt the baby she had helped bring into the world, because she was prohibited from doing so in the place she and her partner worked and lived and called home. On June 26 of that same year, the United States Supreme Court overturned an antisodomy law on the books in the state of Texas, ruling, effectively, that the private sexual activity of consenting adults is none of the government’s business. And when, during the early summer of 2003, Canada became the third country in the world to recognize same-sex marriage at the national level, streams of gay and lesbian couples made their way to Toronto, Ottawa, and other metropolitan centers to be legally wed.

These three events do more than tell us about the state of social and political acceptance of the rights of same-sex couples in these two regions in North America. They point to social changes in the industrialized world that have been underway since at least the latter part of the twentieth century—changes in which sexuality and procreation have become uncoupled and baby making of all sorts, including the hi-tech and clinical kind, has increasingly occurred outside heterosexual marriage. Governments re-
spond in different ways to these new modes of family formation and inti-
macy. But the results of these changes must be understood as nothing less
than novel kinship formations that depart radically from those of the past
and from all convention.

New social formations themselves prompt innovations in other institu-
tional arenas, including those that helped to produce the new formations
in the first place. Social relations between women and men, sexuality, con-
cepts of self and identity, knowledge, politics, and culture—all of these
and more are affected by the new family formations appearing in North
America and throughout the developed world. There is much to be
learned from these families that break with convention, not the least of
which is how they are doing and the ways they are transforming our cul-
ture. The theoretical, political, and social implications for Western soci-
ety are potentially staggering, particularly the changes that may occur, for
example, in the societal gender order, in which men remain dominant,
controlling resources and wielding authority, while women gain snippets
of status here and there but rarely “freedom” or “emancipation” on a col-
lective level. What may we expect to see within and outside such a signif-
icant societal institution as “the family” when a major structural feature of
it has been radically altered?

Historically, feminist analysts, from first-wave white, middle-class fem-
inist writers and activists during the mid-nineteenth century in the
United States and England to later second-wave radical thinkers (again
mostly Euro-American and middle class), have trenchantly criticized what
they have seen as a recurrent pattern within families for which heterosex-
ual procreation and parenting supplied the basic familial context: women
assume primary responsibility for child care and other unremunerated
domestic labor while men develop relationships and maintain status in
the extrafamilial public sphere of production, politics, and culture. With
women doing more unpaid, socially necessary labor than men, the conse-
quences for them as a subservient class have been predictable and endur-
ing. Women and their children are dependent on unreliable male income
providers or the state for their very survival. In the United States, the fem-
inization of poverty, the growing number of children living in poverty,
and, more recently, the increase of African American children living in ex-
treme poverty illustrate the net material effect of generations of women
doing unpaid domestic labor and low-paid wage labor while husbands and
male partners exercise the freedom to determine their own fate and theirs alone.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman conceptualized this situation as the “sexuo-economic relation,” whereby women, put simply, trade sex for their daily bread. Women’s bodies, reproductive capacity, sexuality, emotions, and labor are used by men, whose superior social capital has enabled them to own and control these female commodities. Seventy years later, Shulamith Firestone, in her second-wave radical feminist treatise *The Dialectic of Sex*, expressed the belief that the problem lay substantially in the fact that only women were biologically equipped and responsible for the reproduction of the species. As soon as reproductive technology eliminated physiologically based conception, gestation, and birth of new humans, she argued, women would no longer be disproportionately burdened with this task of population replacement and, more important, could no longer be exploited by men on account of it.¹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Western biomedical science is quickly approaching the Firestone moment. But the implementation of ever greater “advances” in reprogenetic technologies points out what other feminist observers have thought for some time: Firestone’s apparently “natural” unequal distribution of biological reproductive tasks between the sexes does not in itself give rise to gendered social relations, which merely reflect or accommodate the underlying biological division. Rather, gender conventions—enduring ideas about women’s and men’s appropriate roles, responsibilities, and conduct—constitute the ground on which men justify their exploitation and subordination of women and extract women’s “consent” to this state of affairs. Ideas and assumptions about biological reproduction, about what women’s and men’s sexed bodies mean, or even that bodies are sexed create the basis for our thinking that reproductive anatomy furnishes important natural clues as to how human society, and more specifically human primary groups such as families, ought to be organized.

Radical socialist contemporaries of Firestone, such as the French philosopher Monique Wittig, following de Beauvoir, along with authors of feminist utopian fiction, such as Marge Piercy and Ursula Le Guin, theorized (and fantasized) that the prospects for societal gender egalitarianism were promising where domestic experiments in conscious, equitable
child care and household labor were possible. But for Le Guin and Wittig, the categories of male and female, the “classes” of “women” and “men” themselves, first needed to be abolished. Thus Le Guin populated her utopian society in *Left Hand of Darkness* with androgynous beings, while Wittig emphasized that the categories of “male” and “female” construct the differences that are then attributed to biology and that consequently these metaphysical constructs must be eradicated.\(^2\)

Short of androgyny as the ideal solution, social experiments in conscious sex equity within domestic arrangements seemed desirable to some second-wave feminists. For heterosexual-parent families, such experiments (whether based on communal or dual-parenting arrangements) would involve male partners actively and equally sharing in domestic work and child rearing, perhaps even forgoing occupational achievement and economic security in favor of more flexible jobs enabling them to uphold their egalitarian family practice. For heterosexual-parent families, this would be a solution to the gendered power men exercise over and against women, for in redistributing unremerunated domestic labor equally between adults, partners would discontinue the process whereby men vis-à-vis women accumulate economic advantage, or what the social theorist R. W. Connell calls the “patriarchal dividend.”\(^3\) Gilman’s sexuo-economic relation would be disabled.

Although some analysts documenting trends from the 1970s to the 1980s viewed changes in the economic and sexual independence of white, middle-class women as movement toward equality, second-wave feminists did not see their vision of equitable domestic arrangements materialize in the United States. Similar efforts to achieve this vision in many northwestern European countries produced few significant results.\(^4\) Although women’s aggregate labor force participation and educational opportunities steadily expanded, such ostensibly favorable societal trends actually did little to ameliorate women’s subordinated economic and social position. For, as feminist economic analysis points out, women’s level of labor force participation is in fact dictated by their family responsibilities, responsibilities that nowadays include not only child care and household work but care of elderly family members as well.\(^5\)

Some second-wave feminist analysts and other women, both during the heady decades of their political writing and social experimentation and later, concluded that egalitarian heterosexual relations and families were
not possible. Several women who are the subjects of this book were in their twenties during the late 1960s and 1970s and were exclusively heterosexual then. Now they are coparents to children borne by younger women partners, and they describe poignantly, sometimes angrily, their earlier family situations with indifferent or willfully dominating male spouses and partners. One in particular saw her ex-husband’s abusively controlling behavior as stemming from his breadwinner role: at the time, it seemed to her that because her husband earned more money than she did, he could claim the prerogative of demanding her total compliance with his wishes. Others recall their observations over the years of heterosexual-parent families, including their own families of origin, in which the evidence of male domination and often violence so powerfully etched itself in their minds that they view the fatherless families they have now created and live in as blessings. But whether they see male domination within heterosexual-parent families in its brute expression as physical violence or psychological abuse or as a “rational” playing out of men’s advantaged economic position compared to women’s, women in this book as well as many critical feminist analysts doubt that gendered social power in families is a thing of the past. The institutionalization of the battered women’s movement and the feminization of poverty offer sufficient evidence for the persistence of male dominance in families.

More affirmatively, feminist and sociological analyses have indicated what would be needed for more egalitarian gender relations both within and outside families. For heterosexual-parent families, the proposition has mostly remained unchanged from the earlier analysis: heterosexual men must consciously resist, must continuously forewear, their gender privilege, becoming real partners to their wives and lovers and involving themselves fully with their children as caregiving and not just recreational or breadwinning parents. For too many African American families, the denial of these basic family roles to incarcerated male kinfolk creates an impossible burden for women to bear alone—even with assistance from extended family. For black communities all throughout the United States, the institutionalized racism that has prevented scores of African American men from participating in family life more fully and constructively must be eradicated. There must be an ongoing abolition movement to end the slavery of prison and the unjust incarceration of African Americans everywhere—not just those with celebrity status.
Since the possibility of full male participation in family life has yet to be realized on any substantial collective level—a situation that clearly reflects powerful social structural, ideological, and psychological resistance—it is important that we may now have a viable alternative family type from which to learn whether and how gender equality might be achieved. For with the emergence of lesbian- and gay-parent families in recent years comes the promising opportunity to explore how their practices, in principle free of historically produced, socially enforced gender conventions, might point the way toward the disconnection of gender and power, not only in their families, but in other societal arenas and institutions. A primary aim of this book is thus to explore whether, and how, the practices of dual-mother families may challenge the constitutive substance of gendered social power.

UTOPIA NOW?

The family, in most strands of social thought, is intricately bound up with gender, so much so that it is difficult to understand the relationship between them. The most rudimentary (and schematic) expression of the relationship between family and gender is that the family produces gender and is itself structured by gender, where gender is understood broadly as a set of social relations that distributes humans into dimorphic sexes and thereby organizes biological reproduction, emotional cathexis, and erotic desire around those two sexes.

The family’s role in the production and reproduction of gender, on the one hand, occurs through the socialization of children. In Freudian terms, children’s gender identity consolidates by means of the successful resolution of the oedipal crisis. On the other hand, parents themselves have already been “socialized” by the gender system—which includes the wider cultural meanings and expectations associated with dimorphic sex—and project their own internalized understandings of gender and sexuality in their relations with spouses, lovers, and children. None of these relations or processes is a matter of straightforward reproduction or correspondence; they are extremely complex, with the family itself mediated so much by and through other institutions, including mass media, that it may make sense to begin thinking of the family-in-representation as more important than families in actuality in the production of gendered per-
Psychoanalysis shows us how the family division of labor in which women mother gives socially and historically specific meaning to gender itself. This engendering of men and women with particular personalities, needs, defenses, and capacities creates the condition for and contributes to the reproduction of this same division of labor. The sexual division of labor both produces gender differences and is in turn reproduced by them. [Psychoanalysis] suggests that major features of the social organization of gender are transmitted in and through those personalities produced by the structure of the institution—the family—in which children become gendered members of society.

Sexual orientation (sexual object choice) is predicated on the social constitution of individuals as male and female, so the significance of lesbian- and gay-parent families in relation to gender and power has more to do with the gender of parents than the sexual orientation of parents per se. The significance of same-sex-parent families for the gender order also moves beyond a simple question of whether children will be conventionally gendered, for this question does not speak directly to the issue of the source of gendered power in families. Power is immanent in gender relations as a result of what Connell calls “the creation of a relevance” upon, and the suppression of sameness of, the reproductive biology of human bodies. Like anthropologist Gayle Rubin before him, who conceptualized the sex/gender system as social arrangements by which “the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped,” Connell sees the social structure that is gender as a “particular historical response to human reproductive biology.” That historical response, the creation of a sexual distinction of and relevance upon human reproductive biology, conveys social power relationally toward those whose sex as defined by the distinction subsequently benefit from that distinction. The power of gender derives from the definition, meaning, and practices of women in relation to the definition, meaning, and practices of men. Men in relation to women have historically benefited from the sexual distinction and relevance made of human reproductive biology, and because this distinction and relevance
occur most dramatically and initially within the family, the power of gender and gendered relations is felt perhaps most acutely here.\textsuperscript{11}

Within families headed by heterosexual parents, for whom gendered relations of power have been operative—from the overt violence committed by men against women to the subtler forms of male prerogative exercised over and against the wishes of women—the newest members of society see these displays of the power of gender and learn from them. Children see the relational exercise of power, not just the benign “doing” of gender, and parents feel the force of their relative domination and subordination in the myriad ways it is played out between them.

Theoretically, then, if two parents within a family are of the same gender, the power exercised relationally between them will not be attached to gender: that is, it will not be the expression of power immanent to the social construct of sexual distinction. If gender is a particular historical response to human reproductive biology, as I believe with Connell and Rubin and other theorists that it is, and further, if “it is possible to make other collective responses,” as Connell asserts,\textsuperscript{12} same-sex parenting may represent such an alternative response. If the social arrangements by which sexuality and procreation are organized do not honor the sociohistorical distinction made of reproductive anatomy, and if parents do not in their own relationship represent biological sex distinction, then theoretically the power immanent in gender, and gender relations themselves, will be profoundly disrupted. Casting it in Freudian terms, Rivers asked speculatively:

If families increasingly exist in American society where children are being socialized in a same-sex environment, does this not alter Freud’s famous formulation? Are the law of the father and the castration fear that accompanies it not affected by the fact that both primary caregivers are women? Or by the fact that there are two fathers, and not a mother existing in opposition to a father who represents the social order?\textsuperscript{13}

The theoretical implications reach beyond the family, however, since “the law of the father” suffuses practices in virtually all of social life, including the division of labor, the definition and distribution of authority, and relations of emotional attachment and desire. As Connell has argued,
these three domains especially—“labor,” “power,” and “cathexis”—consti-
tute the structures of gender. They are the fields of social practice in
which gendered power arises and that concomitantly pervade such social
institutions as the family. A change in the gender arrangements within the
family, a disconnection of the organization of sexuality and biological re-
production from gendered power, could have ramifications for the gender
order in these other fields of social practice. For instance, if the recalcitrance
of contemporary gender inequality is linked to a continuing sexual
division of labor within families, which in turn reinforces the sexual divi-
sion of labor within the economy and society, the prospects for destabi-
lizing this system would seem to be located most plausibly in the practices
of people living in families where the family structure itself provides an al-
ternative to the heterosexual-parent model.

Theoretically, much would be different in a family in which another
woman parented in lieu of a heterosexual father whose position relative to
his spouse and children and within society was one of material advantage
and cultural dominance. And as distinguished from single-mother fami-
lies, only the most privileged of which enjoy economic security and social
well-being, dual-mother families with their prospects for dual earning
theoretically would be more economically viable and thus perhaps less
recked by the stress and hardship single-mother families experience in
their daily survival. Though less advantaged economically than hetero-
sexual-parent families with the superior male wage, the potential im-
provement in quality of life for children and women in lesbian-coparent
families suggests an important social and economic benefit of this new
family form.\textsuperscript{14}

At the same time, the possible quality-of-life benefits of these families
may redound not only to family members themselves but potentially
throughout the culture as mothers and children educate friends and their
own extended-family members, make themselves visible to neighbors and
work colleagues, and demand recognition from the most public of audi-
ences: state legislatures, schools, and the like. In this light, as lesbian-
coparent families in their everyday lives cycle back and forth through the
most intimate space of their own families and friendship circles to the more
socially distanced world of work and public interaction, the prospects for
progressive social change appear dramatic. For the more viable, visible, and
institutionalized these families become, the greater are the opportunities
for educating people to new, unconventional ways of thinking about the contexts in which children might be raised with an abundance of love, economic security, social well-being, and justice. It is a twenty-first-century utopian fantasy, guilty of the same romanticism as the earlier movements. But there may be reason for the optimism: if other “collective responses to human reproductive biology,” such as same-sex procreation and parenting, became viable, “what would be lost,” as Connell writes, would be “the necessary connection of the elements of gender relations to institutionalized inequality on one side and biological difference on the other. The depth of this change should not be underestimated. It would be a fundamental departure from a key condition of our present culture, which might be summarized as the sense that gender is fatality.”

As an ethnographic study of lesbian-coparent families living in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late-twentieth-century United States, this book offers an in-depth, theoretically informed analysis of the everyday life-world of families who, until now, have mostly appeared in fantasy and fiction. Lesbian couples all over the world, in the United States, and in the San Francisco Bay Area are creating families by bearing and adopting children and parenting them together. The families who are the subjects of this book are headed by lesbian couples who intentionally incorporated biologically related children into their lives by means of donor insemination.

As one of several so-called assisted-reproduction procedures employed to bring about human conception, donor insemination, like other procedures, does not just assist with biological procreation. It facilitates the generation of new types of families, such as lesbian-coparent families, but it also creates conditions for even more elaborate kinship networks to develop, a topic I address specifically in Chapter 7. The point, for now, is that the “new” reproductive technologies facilitate the creation of “new” families that, in their multiplicity of forms, their definitional fluidity, and, quite simply, their unconventionality, at once reflect a postmodern kinship situation and offer the possibility of substantial, self-conscious social change in family practice. New reprogentic technologies also threaten to alter, permanently, the nature of human and nonhuman life as we and history have known it, as Margaret Atwood’s 2003 dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* envisions so vividly. It depends on who controls the technology and who is permitted access to it. Families of the two-mother kind where at least one mother is biologically related to the child due to mothers’ access
to certain procreative technologies represent, for some, an unambiguously beneficial application of the new technologies. In fact, some would argue that gay and lesbian couples present the most socially and politically defensible case for the need for procreative technologies because without them no gay person would be able to exercise biological kinship or reproduction rights, which are increasingly defined legally and culturally as human rights. (This is why the right to—and in the United Kingdom state support of—infertility “treatment” for heterosexual people is considered inviolate, despite the moral injunctions of theologians with a stake in preserving the opposition between God and science.) Procreative technologies and developments in reproductive medicine are central to the contemporary formation of new and alternative families such as lesbian-coparent families; they thus form part of both the larger and the more local context in which these families come into being and live their lives.

Ongoing legal developments also contribute to social context here. Families with two mothers and no father push family law beyond its twentieth-century limits. Actually existing families with two mothers who may not legally marry each other must be reckoned with doctrinally and pragmatically by the legal system. Pragmatically, the mechanism favored by judges and legal scholars interested in promoting the welfare of these families is second-parent adoption, by which judges grant nonbirth mothers legal standing as equal parents vis-à-vis their birth-parent partners. But within the larger political arena, neoconservative politicians and right-wing operatives (as well as more than a few liberal academics) have no interest in seeing the state promote families intentionally formed without fathers. Lesbian-coparent families have thus been born into a society that facilitates their creation through assisted-reproduction technology and enterprise but then politically, legally, and culturally contests their right to exist.

Setting aside for the moment the question of how mainstream culture and legal and political institutions in the United States are processing the latest kinship innovation (which I take up in the final chapter), I want to indicate, in the outline of chapter contents that follows, the ways in which lesbian-coparent families may be understood as agents of social change at the “grass roots” and are thus potentially capable of destabilizing the ground upon which gendered power historically has been founded. If, as so many feminist observers over the years have argued, the reproduction
of the social organization of gender—in which men and masculinist values dominate—has depended in part upon the gender hierarchy precipitated and perpetuated within heterosexual-parent families, the larger cycle may be partially broken by a historically new familial formation whose structure and practice represents a substantial break with convention. Lesbian coparents, their children, and their practice, I argue, may very well constitute this break.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

One of my primary objectives with this work has been to describe and interpret these families’ everyday practices and patterns of experience as they narrated them in intensive interviews and as I observed some of them in action. The subjects of this book are thirty-four San Francisco Bay Area families made up of lesbian couples and their children, in which the children were planned and conceived in the context of the couple relationship, and one partner gave birth. In the methodological appendix I offer a complete description of my research design and method, the sociodemographic features of the families, and the social and economic context within which they go about their business.

This group of families is not especially diverse in racial-ethnic or social class composition. No African American families responded to my recruitment efforts, and many families who participated earned comfortable levels of income in the Bay Area of the mid-1990s. The absence of black lesbian mothers in this group is deeply problematic insofar as their experience is also absent from these pages. The degree to which racism shapes, organizes, and colors their experience as partners in lesbian-coparent families goes unrepresented. Throughout the book, but especially in the appendix, I remark on the role these absences play in what counts as knowledge about lesbian-coparent families.

Beyond what may be claimed about this group of Bay Area families, the larger political and cultural context for lesbian and gay parents everywhere has become, in one sense, clarified, especially with the 2003 Supreme Court Lawrence decision. In the United States today, gay and lesbian existence, civil rights, visibility, and cultural politics are more substantially asserted within mainstream public discourse and media than ever before. At the same time, homophobic, fundamentalist, antifeminist, and more
moderate conservative discourses and groups collectively compose a backlash force that serves to check the progress of gay and lesbian liberation. In turn, the backlash incites new rounds of gay/lesbian political organizing, reinvigorated educational efforts, and campaigns for social justice. The women and families who are the subjects of this book are part of this much larger story and discourse about gay identity and politics. The story involves strategic policy making and politics at the national (and international level); the changing values of a culture that has been slow to acknowledge that it ceded the moral high ground on matters sexual some time ago and thus repeatedly finds itself in hypocritical stances toward gay and lesbian existence; and liberal academic positions that echo the conservative family values line about the need to repair “broken” families and to “get back” to a more “traditional” (read: neopatriarchal) family structure and ethos.

Chapter 1 describes some of the features of this larger national cultural context as a way to highlight some of the political stakes and practical concerns for lesbian- and gay-parent families in the United States more generally. This chapter also outlines a sociohistorical account of the relationship between the formation of gay identities and families, arguing that the relationship has been marked by definitional practices that earlier constructed gay identity and families as incompatible but later turned to gay family creation as an affirmative act of political and cultural affirmation.

Chapters 2 through 7 present an ethnographic account of the lives of the families who generously shared their thoughts, experiences, memories, and opinions with me. As the interpreter and teller of one of many stories that may be derived from those of my subjects, I’ve chosen to present this account in a format that focuses first on the couple relationship before children came along. The story then gradually moves from “inside” the family to “outside,” from internal family dynamics to relations with mothers’ families of origin and finally to relations with social others and institutions. Though tracing the contours of their lives in this way imposes an ordering upon their lifeworld that is entirely my invention,16 it does offer, I think, a helpful structure for apprehending the complexity and depth, the texture and rhythms of discrete life arenas starting with the most intimate and ending with the most public. The connections between the personal and political, and between biography and history, come to life.

Chapter 2 thus introduces some of the families and begins the ethno-
graphic journey at the moment of these women’s transition from being a couple to becoming parents, exploring the decisions, from the most mundane to the most philosophically vexing, that the women made in starting their families. In this chapter they recollect their family planning process and their experience of conceiving their children by medically managed donor insemination.

Following Chapter 2’s account of their experience of becoming parents, Chapter 3 looks at their narrated experience of being parents. In particular, it raises questions about whether and how the psychodynamic mechanisms that reproduce gendered parenting practices in heterosexual-parent families are operative in these families. Here I draw upon feminist psychoanalytic social theory to analyze mothers’ parenting practices and their likely effects for children’s development—including children’s “acquisition” of gender identity.

Chapter 4 continues the analysis of parents’ practices within their immediate domestic context, taking up, this time, their division of labor. It considers the total complex of work-and-family labor and thus also takes into account parents’ paid work practices that, strictly speaking, do not occur within the household. But whereas in the analysis of heterosexual-parent families one speaks of household work and child care as the “second shift”\(^ \text{17} \)—what heterosexual wives working in the paid labor force do after putting in full days on the job—there is no “women’s second shift” in the analysis of lesbian-coparent work-family labor. One does not begin with an assumption of a gendered and therefore unequal division of labor that has created the second shift. We see how these mothers’ division of paid and unpaid labor, like their parenting practices examined in Chapter 3, fails to replicate the unequal, gendered arrangements that most contemporary heterosexual-parent families are still unable to avoid even when they strenuously attempt to do so.

Chapter 5 takes the first look at lesbian-coparent families’ relationships with people who are not immediate members of the families they have created, relationships that are consequently somewhat less intimate. But they are not exactly distant, either, since the focus of this chapter is on mothers’ accounts of their relationships with members of their own families of origin. Specifically, this chapter attempts to understand whether and in what ways mothers’ relations with their natal kin change with the arrival of their own children. It examines differences between the depictions of
biological and nonbiological mothers’ relations with their families of origin to understand the role that beliefs about biological relatedness might play in these extended kin relations.

Chapter 6 examines families’ interactions with people who are non-intimates: strangers in public places, casual acquaintances, co-workers, members of parenting support groups, medical and health professionals, counselors, teachers and principals, and other individuals with whom mothers necessarily interact in the course of their daily rounds. This social interaction plays out differently for partners who are nonbiological parents. Since families “obviously” cannot have two mothers, and birth mothers have the status of biogenetic relatedness going for them, nonbiological mothers find themselves in the position of explaining who they are in relation to their children, thereby creating a new social identity as comother in dual-mother families. In proving that families need not issue from heterosexual-parent couples, they deploy various information management strategies that revolve around the disclosure of sexual identity. Nonbiological lesbian mothers are thus peculiarly positioned (vis-à-vis their birth-parent partners) to educate and foster understanding about a two-parent family form that is not supposed to exist.

This analysis of the interactional accomplishment of a new category of kinship extends to the presentation and representation of the entire family in public places. In becoming visible and recognized, lesbian-coparent families interactionally signify themselves as “family.” Their constitutive performances of family occur at their children’s schools (with principals and teachers), in doctors’ offices, at day care, and at parents’ places of work. Chapter 6 thus also describes how families inscribe their existence into the public and institutional realms where they conduct their lives and, in so doing, transform the expectations and normative categories of kinship.

Chapter 7 examines how lesbian mothers may choose to constitute their families in another way: by recognizing members of the sperm donor’s family (when he is known) as their family and by recognizing as family other lesbian-coparent families whose children share a donor with theirs, mothers may extend the borders of their kin to include elaborate sets of relationships. I refer to both these ways in which lesbian-coparent families can extend their kinship via the donor as a type of latent donor-extended kinship network. This donor-extended kinship structure be-
comes manifest only to the extent that mothers choose to act upon knowledge of their children’s biological relatedness to others via the donor. This variation of new kinship formation is the result of mothers’ use of assisted-procreation procedures.

This situation raises questions about how families and kinship will be defined more generally as a result of expanding First World use of increasingly sophisticated and expensive reproductive technologies. By considering the relationship among reproductive technologies and commerce, the law, and family definition and practice, Chapter 8 returns to the larger societal context. This chapter attempts to account for the ways in which lesbian-coparent families fit into the developing Western family and kinship system and contribute to the undoing of the gender order from which they, and it, have emerged.