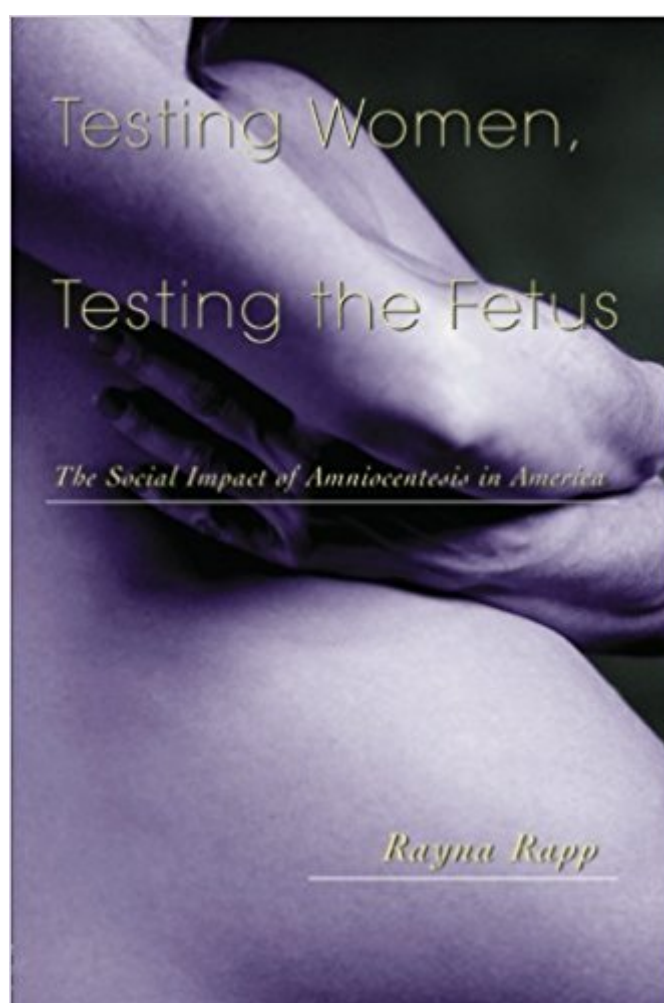


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Testing Women, Testing The Fetus: The Social Impact Of Amniocentesis In America (The Anthropology Of Everyday Life)



Synopsis

Rich with the voices and stories of participants, these touching, firsthand accounts examine how women of diverse racial, ethnic, class and religious backgrounds perceive prenatal testing, the most prevalent and routinized of the new reproducing technologies. Based on the author's decade of research and her own personal experiences with amniocentesis, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus* explores the "geneticization" of family life in all its complexity and diversity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At 36, Rapp, an anthropologist at the New School for Social Research, had amnio for her first, wanted, pregnancy. When the results showed Down's syndrome, she chose abortion, with much grief. Her experience led to 15 years of research on how women of many social, economic and religious backgrounds experience genetic testing and how they interpret the information this new medical technology provides. The result is a thoughtful, if concentrated, analysis that is rich with the voices of genetic counselors, lab technicians and geneticists; pregnant women who chose to be tested as well as those who refused; those who got "bad" results; and parents of children with disabilities. In addition to tracing how genetic counselors' focus on individual choice can mask social context, Rapp also reveals how women, with or without their partners, negotiate the important decision whether or not to undergo the test. One chapter dissects the miscommunications that

occur when technical language is translated into the vernacular. Another chapter lays bare how expectant parents think about fetal disability and resonates with one concerning parents of disabled children. Rapp concludes that prenatal testing puts women in the role of "moral philosophers," learning to think about statistical risk analysis in relation to the "natural" process of pregnancy. Readers unimpressed by academic writing will find this study a valuable exploration of the moral and personal decisions involved in bringing a pregnancy to term. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Rapp, a feminist medical anthropologist who chose to terminate a pregnancy after learning that the fetus had Down syndrome, examines the social impact and cultural meaning of the prenatal tests currently available, having interviewed women waiting for test results, deciding whether to continue a pregnancy, or who refused to be tested. By observing genetic counselors at work and talking to families raising children with disabilities, she discovers the practical problems connected with testing and the different responses to pregnancy, family life, and disability in diverse ethnic groups and social classes. Her analysis of the intersection of reproductive and disability rights and their links to feminist and power issues is interesting. This jargon-filled and heavily theoretical work is not for women making decisions about testing, though; Lachlan de Crespigny's *Which Tests for My Unborn Baby?: Ultrasound and Other Prenatal Tests* (Oxford Univ., 1996) is a good choice for them. Recommended for academic women's studies and health sciences collections. A Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland P.L., CA Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

How does one, as an anthropologist, write about amniocentesis? Rapp's work redefines the scope of anthropological inquiry helping us look at U.S. culture as an acceptable site of investigation. Focusing on both the "medical establishment" and the "clients" it serves, the book leads us into alternate worlds of creating/inventing medical technology, and delivering medical technology. It is not as simple as putting women through a standardized process; there are questions of individual need, race, spirituality, class, profession, family support, and many other factors that affect the process of amniocentesis and the value of the procedure to the women who receive or refuse the technology. Beautifully written, Rapp follows many threads, both narrative and scientific, to reveal a picture that is not quite so neat.

I read Rapp's *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus* for an anthropology/gender studies class, and as

an examination of the way different ethnic groups in NYC approach amniocentesis and prenatal testing as a whole, it might be very interesting. However, that is not what the book is about. The book is supposed to be about the impact that amniocentesis has on women's lives as they are faced with the decision not only to have the test, but what to do with the information they receive. But Rapp was so intent on characterizing each of her interview subjects by race, occupation (hence class) and gender, that she ultimately separated and categorized her subjects in ways that left the reader hanging. She did not make any definite conclusions about amniocentesis, only that women make decisions about amnio based on values they had before they even got pregnant, possibly due to ethnicity. If I were pregnant this book wouldn't help me at all in making a decision. But the chapters on how the tests are analyzed are quite interesting, and the chapters on disability and the way we as a society deals with disabled children in an age when it's easy for them never to be born changed the way I think about disability, and for that reason alone I think it should be read.

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