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Book Review - Down's Syndrome Screening and Reproductive Politics: Care, Choice and Disability in the Prenatal Clinic.

Clare Howie

Thomas' book is a timely text during a period in which the NHS is rolling out Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) across England and Wales. The focus of Thomas' book is an 'ethnographic unpacking' of the complicated politics of screening for Down's syndrome. The book is aimed at academics, students, and professionals, and provides an overview of the screening process. It uses research collected from prenatal clinics to give the reader an insight into the perspective of the consultants, midwives, and sonographers involved in Down's syndrome screening.

The book is made up of seven chapters. The introductory chapter gives the reader a detailed explanation of the studies that are the primary focus of the book. Chapter Two gives a breakdown of the complex socio-history of screening for Down's syndrome and how this applies in the modern context. This chapter is a clear, well-rounded introduction into the world of prenatal screening and I would recommend this as a good starting point for anyone beginning to examine this area. Chapters Three and Four focus on the data that were collected at the two clinics throughout the course of the research. A key point highlighted here is the discrepancy between the way healthcare professionals and parents consider and experience Down's syndrome screening. Whilst health professionals tend to view it as a routine task, it can be, for parents, a life-changing experience. This discrepancy may result in some parents feeling unsupported in their experience, an issue which Thomas suggests may be compounded by staff being put under constant time pressure. Chapters Five and Six delve into the incongruence between the personal views of the healthcare professionals involved in the research and the language they use during the screening process. Chapter Seven provides the conclusion of the book and Thomas raises important points about the ethical considerations that may be taken into account before implementing screening programmes.

The book focuses on research carried out in two prenatal clinics (one private, one NHS) in Wales and the author states the main subjects of the studies were the healthcare professionals involved in the screening process. Thomas is correct in asserting that professionals are often overlooked in research in this area. However, the parent experience is a valuable perspective as they are the individuals ultimately making the reproductive choices at the end of the process. For those wishing to examine both professional and parental perceptions of screening, this book does not offer a comprehensive parental experience of prenatal screening, however, Thomas does state this from the beginning. This book presents important research on professionals' discourse and experiences in providing

screening for Down's syndrome and I would argue that this text should be considered by policymakers for the rolling out of screening programmes.

This book provides an objective view of the screening process for Down's syndrome. However, it also highlights the disparity between healthcare professionals' views on the screening process and Down's syndrome as a condition. As someone with previous experience as a professional in Down's syndrome screening, and as a sibling of a person with Down's syndrome, I know of the benefits of prenatal screening, but also of the concern from families of people with Down's syndrome about the handling of the screening process. It can be a contentious issue, however, Thomas has presented a balanced view while making the reader examine their own biases and question the discourse currently used.

This is a book that I would recommend to both those with and without experience in prenatal screening and Down's syndrome. Thomas breaks down the terminology and the process of screening for the condition in a way that would be accessible for those without thorough knowledge. This book uses sociological methodology to examine the human processes behind a biomedical procedure with potentially life-changing results. Thomas dedicates part of the final chapter to discuss NIPT, which at time of print was only emerging, and there has been a call from campaigners in the Down's syndrome community for the need for balanced information and informed choice with this screening method (Down's Syndrome Association, 2016). As NIPT is rolled out across the NHS and is already available in the private healthcare sector, this book may provide an interesting comparison between the discourses used for previous screening techniques against modern techniques.

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