The Context of Debate
The three chapters in this part provide the contextual framework through which the debate on the complex issues raised by reproductive genetic testing should be analyzed. Abby Lippman argues that the application of prenatal genetic testing both reflects and generates the process of "geneticization" that increasingly orients contemporary stories of health and disease in our Western culture. She examines some of the stories being told about prenatal testing and questions their themes of reassurance and choice, their construction of risk, and their assumptions about disability. She explores the lifestyle testing creates for pregnant women, the testing itself, and its power to control both how we live and the children we bear. Complex and troubling questions are brought to the light that require examination: Would women naturally be concerned about these genetic risk factors during pregnancy if those risk factors weren't sought out and identified by health care providers? Do women subsequently have their heightened anxiety relieved, sometimes falsely so, when the results of the testing provided turn out to be normal?

With this contextual framework in place, Ruth Schwartz Cowan provides a historical perspective on two commonly used prenatal procedures: amniocentesis and chorionic villi sampling. This history indicates that women have played differing roles in the developmental and diffusion stages of both pro-
cedures. Effective future policies regarding the impact of prenatal diagnosis on women may be shaped by lessons learned from that history. Based on such a perspective, how might women have a greater impact on defining the future directions of developing technologies based on their actual needs and interests?

Increasing attention focused on the development and utilization of prenatal testing may have the risk of further stigmatizing individuals with disabilities. Deborah Kaplan examines and describes policy implications of prenatal testing with those concerns in mind. She argues that the most troubling and controversial aspect of prenatal testing is when it results in selective abortion. The most common reasons cited for selective abortion due to disability are based on assumptions made about persons with disabilities, most of which have been neither confirmed nor refuted by research. Is there a known and predictable quality of life that is associated with specific birth defects or genetic disorders? By whose standard should an individual’s quality of life be judged? Is life with a disability worse than no life at all? What potential impact does the increasing availability of prenatal testing have on public attitudes about disability and practices toward people with disabilities?