



Excess Baggage: Leveling the Load and Changing the Workplace

Ellen Roskam

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Based on groundbreaking research on the working conditions of airport check-in workers in two countries, a previously unstudied category of predominantly women workers, Ellen Rosskam describes a form of work characterized as modern-day Taylorism. An occupation greatly affected by new forms of work organization and management practices-caught in the throes of rapid change due to international competition, alliances, mergers, and the application of cost-efficiency strategies-check-in work has been undermined in recent years by the adverse effects of liberalization and technological change. By peeling away the veneer of glamour associated with airport check-in work, Rosskam reveals how changes in work organization in this sector have de-skilled, disempowered, and ultimately demoralized workers. In "Excess Baggage", weaving through the psychological distress, physical pain from musculoskeletal disorders, strain, and violence that check-in workers experience and describe in their own words, a picture emerges of a job perceived to be "safe," "clean," "glamour girl" work, but which is comparable to industrial workplaces that require heavy manual lifting, obligingly performed in skirts, dresses, and pretty little shoes.

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