

THE WORKPLACE REIMAGINED

In the wake of the pandemic, many employers continue to allow their employees to work from home, but much of the workplace remains governed by strict structural norms such as shifts, schedules, attendance, and leave-of-absence policies that determine when and where work is performed. In *The Workplace Reimagined*, Nicole Buonocore Porter explores how these workplace norms marginalize people with disabilities and workers with caregiving responsibilities. Using COVID-19 as a lens to illustrate how entrenched workplace norms are often not inevitable or necessary, Porter theoretically and practically reconceptualizes the workplace to end the stigmatization of these employees and helps readers understand the value of accommodating all workers. This book is timely, eye-opening, and will help us realize a workplace in which we account for the reality, precarity, and diversity of all our lives and bodies.

NICOLE BUONOCORE PORTER is Professor of Law and Director of the Martin H. Malin Institute for Law and the Workplace at Chicago-Kent College of Law, Illinois Institute of Technology. As an expert in employment discrimination and disability law, Porter has authored or coauthored five books and more than 45 law review articles and essays.

The Workplace Reimagined

ACCOMMODATING OUR BODIES AND OUR LIVES

NICOLE BUONOCORE PORTER

Chicago-Kent College of Law, Illinois Institute of Technology



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This book is for my family, for their unwavering support and encouragement. And it's also for all workers everywhere who struggle to balance their jobs with the rest of their lives.

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Preface

My early scholarly work addressed two separate workplace law issues—disability discrimination and discrimination against women with caregiving responsibilities. After several years, I began seeing the similarities between these groups of employees; specifically, both groups of employees are subordinated because they cannot comply with the rigid workplace norms regarding *how* the job is performed or *when* and *where* the job is performed. If they seek modifications to these stringent workplace norms, they are stigmatized for doing so—what I call “special treatment stigma.” Their employers might refuse to provide accommodations, but even if they do, they might look at these employees less favorably, and that will often have workplace consequences such as lower pay, derailed or denied promotions, and sometimes even termination. Moreover, accommodated employees are often resented by their coworkers, either because the coworkers believe the accommodations place unfair burdens on them, or because the coworkers wish they had the same accommodations.

Over the years, I’ve explored many solutions for ending the subordination that these groups of workers experience. But in doing so, I’ve come to realize that the only solutions that can work to end this subordination are solutions that protect all workers. If we accommodate everyone, special treatment stigma should disappear. Accommodations will no longer be seen as preferential treatment; instead, they will simply be seen as doing the work in a different way.

Furthermore, accommodating everyone recognizes the reality that all employees, at times, will need some form of workplace accommodations. Older workers and pregnant workers (in addition to people with disabilities) might need modifications to how the job tasks are completed (such as heavy lifting). Most workers will have periodic needs for short leaves of absence or flexible schedules for a variety of reasons. And of course, all workers get sick. As COVID-19 has taught us, we want those workers to stay home without penalty.

Accordingly, this book explores how we might reimagine the workplace in a way that accommodates all of our bodies and all of our lives.

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Several colleagues and friends have supported my work during my career, and countless conversations with these scholars helped me to think through the concepts and ideas this book addresses. At the risk of leaving someone out (and in no particular order), I want to thank Rebecca Zietlow, Joseph Slater, Rachel Arnow-Richman, Doron Dorfman, Ann McGinley, Michelle Travis, Brad Areheart, Stephen Befort, Laura Kessler, and Deborah Widiss. Finally, I want to thank all of the scholars whose work has inspired me and helped to create this book.