



Standards and Their Stories: How Quantifying, Classifying, and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life (Cornell Paperbacks)

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Standardization is one of the defining aspects of modern life, its presence so pervasive that it is usually taken for granted. However cumbersome, onerous, or simply puzzling certain standards may be, their fundamental purpose in streamlining procedures, regulating behaviors, and predicting results is rarely questioned. Indeed, the invisibility of infrastructure and the imperative of standardizing processes signify their absolute necessity. Increasingly, however, social scientists are beginning to examine the origins and effects of the standards that underpin the technology and practices of everyday life. *Standards and Their Stories* explores how we interact with the network of standards that shape our lives in ways both obvious and invisible. The main chapters analyze standardization in biomedical research, government bureaucracies, the insurance industry, labor markets, and computer technology, providing detailed accounts of the invention of "standard humans" for medical testing and life insurance actuarial tables, the imposition of chronological age as a biographical determinant, the accepted means of determining labor productivity, the creation of international standards for the preservation and access of metadata, and the global consequences of "ASCII imperialism" and the use of English as the lingua franca of the Internet. Accompanying these in-depth critiques are a series of examples that depict an almost infinite variety of standards, from the controversies surrounding the European Union's supposed regulation of banana curvature to the minimum health requirements for immigrants at Ellis Island, conflicting (and ever-increasing) food portion sizes, and the impact of standardized punishment metrics like "Three Strikes" laws. The volume begins with a pioneering essay from Susan Leigh Star and Martha Lampland on the nature of standards in everyday life that brings together strands from the several fields represented in the book. In an appendix, the editors provide a guide for teaching courses in this emerging interdisciplinary field, which they term "infrastructure studies," making *Standards and Their Stories* ideal for scholars, students, and those curious about why coffins are becoming wider, for instance, or why the Financial Accounting Standards Board refused to classify September 11 as an "extraordinary" event.

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Arnulfo Walls:

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