ways in which we understand, negotiate, and discuss sex and sexuality in our classrooms.

East Lansing, Michigan


Reviewed by Halina Adams and Melissa Ianetta, University of Delaware

Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition should—and no doubt, will—find a large audience of both sexes, for it is filled with useful advice for composition professionals at all stages in their academic careers. In addition to its remarkable value as a mentoring resource, Women’s Ways is further distinguished by the precision of its approach. Many career academic handbooks, like Greg M. Semenza’s *Graduate Study for the 21st Century: How to Build a Career in the Humanities* or Donald Hall’s *The Academic Self: An Owner’s Manual* attempt, with greater or lesser success, to avoid a disciplinary-based orientation in the hopes of reaching a broad readership. By contrast, as their title announces, in Women’s Ways co-authors Michelle Baliff, Diane Davis and Roxanne Mountford not only designate a discipline and biological identity, but also further focus their advice on women interested in “making it.”

While certainly each individual must determine the criteria for such achievement, in the introduction the authors define the women who have “made it” considered in this book: “[These women] hold a PhD; are full professors at an academic institution; are tenured; are well-published; are cited regularly; have contributed a consummate piece in the field; are frequently keynote speakers at national conferences; are actively mentoring other women in the field; are able to have a real life, in addition to their scholarly activities” (7). The book that follows is broken into four sections. Of particular interest to graduate students and their mentors, “Becoming a Professional” focuses on strategies to make the most out of graduate school and effectively search for a tenure-track job. The next two sections, “Thriving as a Professional” and “And Having a Life, Too,” offer insights and approaches to those professional and personal issues that confront both junior faculty and senior scholars. In the final section, “Being a Professional: Profiles of Success,” the authors use biographical data and interview excerpts to explain how nine major figures in the field “made it” and what advice and insight their varied experiences yield. In a sense, then, Women’s Ways offers its
readers access to mentoring from such well-respected and highly successful individuals as Susan Jarratt, Cheryl Glenn and Andrea Lunsford. By thus combining a career handbook with a Profiles in (Composition) Courage approach, Baliff, Davis and Mountford create a resource that should not only be required reading for all graduate students in the field but should also find a place on the shelf of any individual in Rhetoric and Composition seeking professional advancement.

Moving from the universal to particular, however, we have found first-hand that the book is of particular interest to those at transitional moments in their careers. Both of us—Halina, a second-year Master’s student attempting to reconcile her interests in writing and literary studies, and Melissa, a junior faculty member now facing tenure and promotion at an institution similar to those of the authors—found validation and advice within the pages of this book, and both of us have recommended this book to our peers. Indeed, during the writing of this review, a common theme that emerged in our discussion was the extent to which Women’s Ways offers different things at different stages in one’s career.

With her PhD applications looming, Women’s Ways offered Halina a refreshing and reassuring take on advancing in the field of composition—for here is a guide written by fellow rhetors who make suggestions as collegial mentors, not omniscient sages. In “Becoming a Professional,” in particular, the authors demonstrate a realistic awareness of the challenges of entering a field at the bottom of the academic food chain and so provide advice with a certain pragmatic genuineness. Graduate students should appreciate the straightforward treatment of dissertation issues: from selecting a topic—“your job is not to win a competition by brilliantly uttering the last word on a topic and putting it forever to rest” (39)—to firing a dissertation director: “maybe your director—let us be blunt—has turned out to be something of an asshole” (53). Furthermore, the authors stress the extension of rhetorical strategies into the job search, thereby making now-vague terrors of MLA and interviews seem less intimidating by offering rhetorical reading strategies for these professional milestones.

When contemplating a life in academia, Halina and many of her peers ponder how to balance work life and personal life. The mental math is intimidating: teaching plus research plus writing plus institutional service plus family equals nervous breakdown. While Women’s Ways remains cautiously less-than-prescriptive in its definitions of success and happiness, it offers the reader hope by focusing on ways in which to succeed in balancing this formula. From surprising insights regarding gauging institutional support for gender-related issues as early as a job interview (73) to coping with the loneliness of academia (193), the authors make a convincing argument for the feasibility—and, in fact, the pleasure—of balancing out the life equation.
Like Halina, Melissa was initially struck by the book’s tone, for it seemed that Baliff, Davis and Mountford’s colloquial, straight-from-the-hip rhetoric lessened the rhetorical distance between readers and text, providing an experience akin to one-to-one mentoring. Even while the tone seemed intimate, the advice was diverse, which stands the reader in good stead: as the graduate of a large Rhetoric and Composition program, Melissa is well aware of the wealth of perspectives and advice represented by the faculty in such a program, as well as the opportunities for networking its alumni represents. For those individuals working in smaller departments—or simply interested in acquainting themselves with perspectives beyond those of their current faculty and peers—Women’s Ways provides a readerly experience analogous to those casual incidents of daily conversation, or those moments of conference small talk with senior scholars that comprise a crucial yet often-overlooked component of professionalization. In like manner, these chapters will also prove similarly useful to both the newest members of our field as well as those individuals who are mentoring graduate students and so looking to broaden their own perspectives.

As in their graduate school material, in “Thriving as a Junior Professor” the authors also provide a wealth of suggestions and strategies. The material on professionalization, with its discussion of self-promotion, confidence-building, and professional integrity, seemed especially useful to a new assistant professor (83-92). So too, the advice on writing and research—which dispels popular faculty myths about the “ideal” writing schedule and illuminates the journey from dissertation to book—seems notably useful to individuals transitioning from the professional habits of graduate school to those of the tenure track.

These primary strengths of this volume, Melissa notes, suggest its limitations as well. As the focus on research and national reputation in the definition of “making it” rightfully implies, for example, this book primarily focuses on the experiences of women at research-oriented schools where publishing a book is the norm—if not merely a minimal expectation—for tenure. Accordingly, the research-related advice focuses on achieving the standard of the single-authored monograph, rather than the challenges facing women faculty at teaching-intensive colleges and universities where the support for conference and research travel can be negligible. Just as a more expansive definition of “making it” may have been desirable, so too the titular category of women might have been opened further. Additional information particular to working class or queer-identifying women and women with disabilities would have been a welcome addition. Given the success this volume is likely to find, perhaps a follow-up volume is in order, one that addresses additional varieties of women’s experiences in Rhetoric and Composition.

While all works have limits, Women’s Ways nevertheless stands as a much needed contribution to our field, a book which mentors will gift to
their mentees, and which both graduate students and faculty will repeatedly consult. As the authors note, “Women who read always have a line of flight available to them, because they know that other ways of being are possible. Women who write offer a line of flight to others” (194). By offering their readers a resource that is both motivating and useful, the authors have charted one such flight through the profession and, as such, have given a gift to the field.

Newark, Delaware


Reviewed by Tara Lockhart, San Francisco State University

In Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Composition and Rhetoric, Paul Butler considers the relative absence of style both within the classroom and within the field’s theoretical conversations. He contends that two faulty premises are to blame for this lack: first, style has been wrongfully associated with the part of composition history some call current-traditional-rhetoric, and second, style has been misunderstood as the opposite of rhetorical invention. In each case, style has been jettisoned from nearly all contemporary discussions of composition theory and practice. The result, Butler claims, is the loss of both a significant body of work and significant resources for composition.

To be clear, Butler’s working definition of style combines rhetorical awareness, compositional choice, and habitual patterns manifested at the level of the sentence, although he notes that stylistic effects often extend to larger sections of discourse. This definition allows Butler to move beyond narrow conceptions of style as either fully unique or as naturally organic—able to be controlled solely by the author or outside of her ability to consciously shape—definitions which create unproductive binaries inadequate to describe how and why style works. Instead, Out of Style offers a historical context that charts and attempts to explain style’s disappearance. Beginning with classical rhetoric and moving through contemporary composition theory, Butler outlines the definitions and debates that have attempted to pinpoint stylistics and, in so doing, rewrites the history of style into a more cogent and consistent narrative. In this way, Out of Style acts as a useful primer on stylistics and its interaction with rhetoric, linguistics, and writing pedagogy.

The most interesting context provided is what Butler deems the “Golden Age” of stylistic pedagogies (1960s to the mid-1980s). Within this period,