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Book Review: Whose Line Is It, Anyway?

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Fashion Journalism. Julie Bradford. Routledge, 2015. 266 pp. \$42.36 paperback.

Many of today's journalism schools have taken great pains to create programs that reflect the journalism industry's diverse interest areas. These areas—or tracks, or sequences, etc.—frequently include subjects such as business journalism, data journalism, science journalism, and sports journalism. But fashion journalism? Probably not.

Aside from a handful of U.S. journalism schools that offer coursework related to fashion journalism, it seems the topic is more often relegated to fashion and design programs. Yet, magazine titles such as *Teen Vogue*, *W*, and *GQ* continue to increase their total audience. Could it be that journalism professors avoid teaching the topic because they lack industry experience? Or perhaps schools are leery of courses that, on the surface, appear glitzy and superficial?

Anyone teaching magazine courses knows, however, how intensely interested many students are in fashion. I was regularly asked by students whether our program offered a course in fashion journalism. As a former editor for *Glamour* and the faculty adviser to our student fashion magazine, *Thread*, I knew that if we were going to offer such a course, I would teach it. Yet, I still felt apprehensive about my own qualifications and what might constitute adequate preparation. Thus, it seemed undeniably fortuitous when I received a promotional email announcing the publication of Julie Bradford's textbook *Fashion Journalism*. After reading it via e-Inspection, I felt confident I could use the book as the foundation for a fashion journalism course, with only minor adjustments.

The book does the heavy lifting for instructors wishing to dip their toes into the fashion pool. The author's past experience as a fashion journalist and current position as programme leader for a fashion journalism sequence at the University of Sunderland in the UK shine through in the book's insightful content and logical organization.

The text is arranged in 13 chapters. The first chapter provides a macro-perspective on working in fashion journalism. The next three chapters overview the industry and outline its relationship to audiences. This cluster provides the foundation for the next grouping of chapters, which focus on standard journalistic topics, such as story ideas, sources, and interviewing; writing news and features; and reporting on the catwalk and fashion trends.

Perhaps the outlier in the book's flow is Chapter 9, which takes a brief detour through the subject of styling, or the art of discerning beauty—both in fashion choices and in editorial or layout decisions. Although the topic is certainly worthy of consideration, it

seems somewhat out of sync with the book's preceding cadence. Further, the next two chapters, which deal with photography and video for online and fashion blogging and social media, seem to better correspond with the previous reporting chapters.

The last two chapters—fashion journalism and PR, and law and ethics—provide a balanced exit. In this final cluster, Bradford offers insights into creating content for fashion clients before discussing the legal and ethical aspects inherent to fashion journalism.

My approach to using the text was to rearrange and cluster the chapters conceptually. I created a syllabus in which the topic for the first three weeks was “Fashion journalism and finding your industry fit”; the assigned readings were chapter 4 (The fashion industry), chapter 3 (Fashion media and audiences), and chapter 1 (Working in fashion journalism). The next four weeks' topic was “The catwalk, the sidewalk, and other inspirations,” and the readings included the skills-related chapters about generating story ideas, finding sources, conducting interviews, and writing fashion news and features. The final big topic, which served a somewhat supplementary role, was titled “Fashion journalism's ‘must-have’ accessories”; the assigned readings were the chapters about photography and video for online use, fashion journalism and PR, and styling. The last week of class addressed material from the book's second chapter, “Ways in to fashion journalism.”

Reorganizing the readings dovetailed with my decision to integrate coverage of the industry's primary fashion weeks, sequentially scheduled in New York, London, Milan, and Paris. Students could reference timely stories and examine multiple journalistic accounts of the same show or event. For example, classroom discussions during London Fashion Week included how (and why) Vanessa Friedman's stories for *The New York Times* were different from what fashion blogger Christine Andrew posted on her hugely popular site, Hello Fashion. I believe such real-time examples are key to vibrant classroom discussions.

But also of value are the book's chockablock industry insights from today's most prominent editors, writers, stylists, and publishers, among others. Although most of the content references the work of European journalists, their perspective is undeniably relevant to today's billion-dollar global media industry and marketplace.

Like an undiscovered alcove in the crowded halls of Serious Journalism, *Fashion Journalism* expands contemporary textbook offerings and reflects the enduring standards of journalism. Whether you wish to lounge in this particular alcove is up to you.