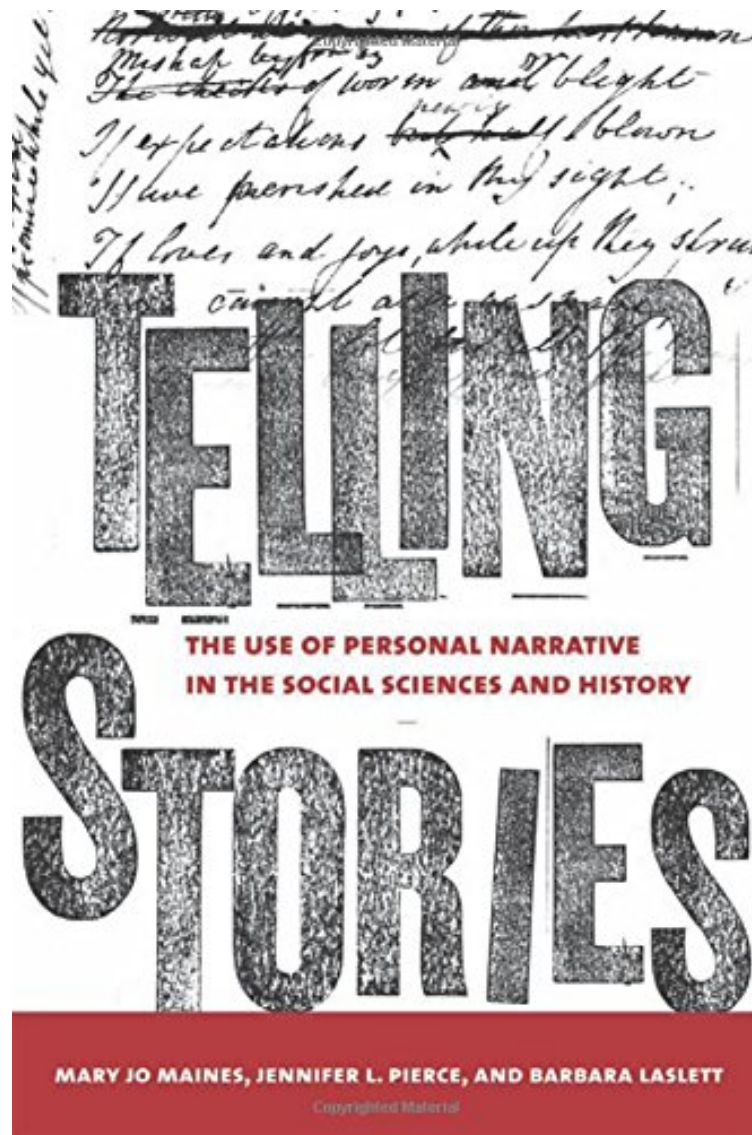


# Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History

Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett

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Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett : Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding! By Leslie J. Irvine Telling Stories examines the versatile

and growing area of narrative analysis in the social sciences and history. The term "narrative" has various meanings, but the authors use it here to refer to personal narrative, or "a retrospective first-person account of the evolution of an individual life over time and in social context" (4). Whereas numerous texts have summarized and discussed the linguistic and structural aspects of narratives, *Telling Stories* shows how narratives can be appreciated for what they reveal about the relationship between the individual and society. The authors are highly respected scholars of history (Maynes), sociology (Laslett), and American Studies (Pierce) who have published long lists of works based on narrative sources. All three have been involved in the development of narrative analysis in their fields. They draw on some of their own works, as well as numerous other examples, to offer a cross-disciplinary discussion of what narratives are and how they "work" as evidence. *Telling Stories* would be of interest to anyone interested in studying the stories people tell. If I could give more than five stars, I would. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting subject matter, terribly terribly jargony writing By JaShong King This book is not, repeat NOT, for the general audience. It is written in incredibly dense and hard to parse jargonese which I assume come from the sociology community. Frequent allusions to "agency" and a myriad of other catchwords that could probably be avoided in the interests of communication with a broader audience. That said, this book has some very intriguing ideas about what narratives mean in a broader social science concept. A good example would be the discussion on how narratives are selected, and the thinking behind narratives as "reflective" of broader historical movements, and whether those values are taken as true or not. I wish I could explain it better, but therein lies the problem of this book and the way it's written. The book is a hunt for the most beautiful wildflowers amidst the highest weeds. It is incredibly tough, incredibly arduous to read. Not all insights are brilliant, but the few that are, stick with you.

In *Telling Stories*, Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett argue that personal narratives, autobiographies, oral histories, life history interviews, and memoirs are an important research tool for understanding the relationship between people and their societies. Gathering examples from throughout the world and from premodern as well as contemporary cultures, they draw from labor history and class analysis, feminist sociology, race relations, and anthropology to demonstrate the value of personal narratives for scholars and students alike. *Telling Stories* explores why and how personal narratives should be used as evidence, and the methods and pitfalls of their use. The authors stress the importance of recognizing that stories that people tell about their lives are never simply individual. Rather, they are told in historically specific times and settings and call on rules, models, and social experiences that govern how story elements link together in the process of self-narration. Stories show how individuals' motivations, emotions, and imaginations have been shaped by their cumulative life experiences. In turn, *Telling Stories* demonstrates how the knowledge produced by personal narrative analysis is not simply contained in the stories told; the understanding that takes place between narrator and analyst and between analyst and audience enriches the results immeasurably.

"This decade has witnessed the publication of several anthologies that focus on how to design and conduct oral history projects; introduce and illustrate new applications of oral history to geographical, historical, and social research; and discuss the application of new technologies to oral history methodology. . . . In this new, important corollary to these works, the authors emphasize the research opportunities available through analysis of personal narratives: 'Read carefully, these sources provide unique insights into the connections between individual life trajectories and collective forces and institutions beyond the individual.' *Telling Stories* belongs in every oral history collection. Summing Up: Essential." *Choice*, July 2009 "Each of these authors brings a wealth of insight and experience to this discussion of the distinctively illuminating arguments that can be drawn from personal narrative materials. Theoretically sophisticated and grounded in an intriguing array of empirical works, *Telling Stories* will be an indispensable resource for those interested in any variety of life-story research." Marjorie DeVault, Syracuse University, author of *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research* "Telling Stories is an invaluable guide to making sense of personal narratives across two key disciplines: social science and history. This clear, thoughtful, and comprehensive guide to key issues and their interpretation questions on agency, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, the complexity of narrative genesis essential reading as we work to comprehend this key source in the production of knowledge." Faye Ginsburg, David B. Kriser Professor of Anthropology, Director, Graduate Program in Culture and Media, and Director, Center for Media, Culture and History, New York University "Telling Stories provides an instructive and usable map of approaches to working with personal narratives. The authors' careful readings of a number of key texts are clear and graceful." Michael Frisch, University at Buffalo, SUNY "Telling Stories supports the value of the narrative turn and offers well-grounded advice to would-be narrative historians." Arthur W. Frank, University of Calgary From the Back Cover "Each of these authors brings a wealth of insight and experience to this discussion of the distinctively illuminating arguments that can be drawn from personal narrative materials. Theoretically sophisticated and grounded in an intriguing array of empirical works, *Telling Stories* will be an indispensable resource for those interested in any variety of life-story research." -- Marjorie DeVault, Syracuse University, author of *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research* "Telling Stories is an invaluable guide to making sense of personal narratives across two key disciplines: social science and history."

This clear, thoughtful, and comprehensive guide to key issues and their interpretation--questions on agency, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, the complexity of narrative genres--is essential reading as we work to comprehend this key source in the production of knowledge."--Faye Ginsburg, David B. Kriser Professor of Anthropology, Director, Graduate Program in Culture and Media, and Director, Center for Media, Culture History, New York University

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About the Author

Mary Jo Maynes is Professor of History at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course and Class Identity in French and German Workers' Autobiographies of the Industrial Era* and author or coeditor of several other books.

Jennifer L. Pierce is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms* and coeditor of two books.

Barbara Laslett is Professor of Sociology Emerita at the University of Minnesota. She is the coeditor of several books, including *Feminist Sociology: Life Histories of a Movement*.