



# 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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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.

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