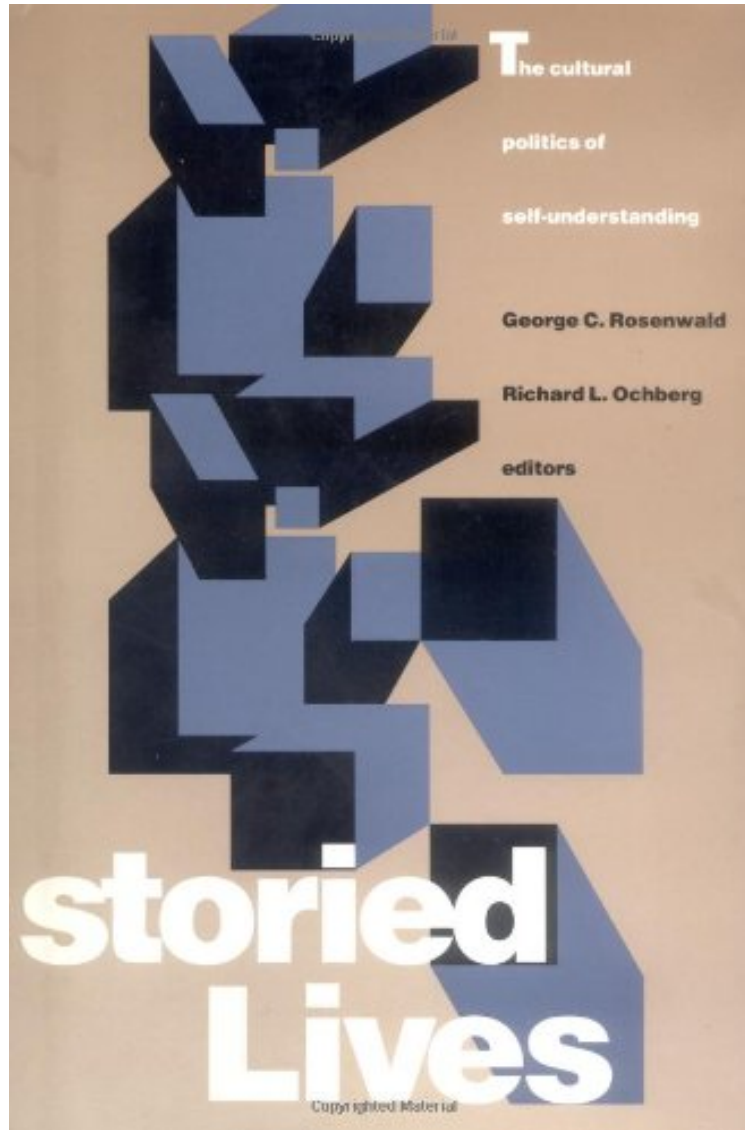


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Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding

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7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A foundational collection By Henry Greenspan In an age when "narrative" looms so large in academic discourse - its construction and its consequences - this collection was one of the first to view the function of life retelling in a complex and original way. The essays are diverse. But, before anything

else, they are readable. Concepts which have so often become obscured beyond comprehension are entirely clear here. And they are anchored in lives and life circumstances across a wide and informative range. This is a foundational collection.

"The stories people tell about themselves are interesting not only for the events and characters they describe but for something in the construction of the stories themselves. The ways in which individuals recount their histories—what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience—all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned."—from the Introduction
In this provocative book, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists analyze interviews with a range of subjects—a minister who uses the death of his son to reaffirm his identity as a man of God, women who have given up their children at birth for adoption and who blame society for their action, Holocaust survivors, a victim of marital rape, and many others. Together these studies suggest a new way of thinking about autobiographical narratives: that these life stories play a significant role in the formation of identity, that the way they are told is shaped (and at times curtailed) by prevalent cultural norms, and that the stories—and at times the lives to which they relate—may be liberated from their psychic and social constraints if the social conditions of story telling can be critically engaged. Presenting a wide range of life stories, these studies demonstrate how "telling one's life" has the potential to clarify or mystify one's commitments and to animate or encumber one's future development.

From the Back Cover
In this provocative book, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists analyze interviews with a range of subjects—a minister who uses the death of his son to reaffirm his identity as a man of God, women who have given up their children at birth for adoption and who blame society for their action, Holocaust survivors, a victim of marital rape, and many others. The editors' object is to present a new way of thinking about autobiographical narratives. They argue that these narratives play a significant role in the formation of identity, that the way they are told is shaped by prevalent cultural norms, and that the stories—and the lives to which they relate—may be liberated from the psychic and social obstacles constraining them if the narrators gain critical insight into their own accounts. Presenting examples of both positive and negative life stories, the authors demonstrate how "telling one's life" has the potential to clarify or question one's commitments and to affirm or modify one's future development.