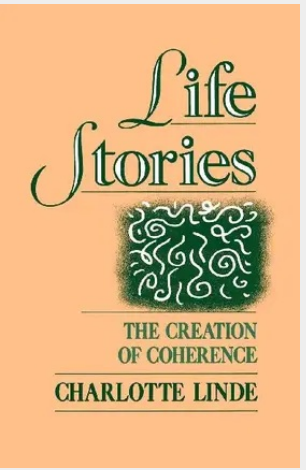
Linde

Life Stories

The Creation of Coherence



This is a sociolinguistic study of how people create and exchange coherent oral life stories. Linde claims such stories serve a number of psychological and social purposes, including the development and expression of a sense of self and the solidification and definition of relationships and group memberships. Linde analyses a series of oral interviews with middle-class Americans who were asked to explain their choice of profession. She focuses on the means by which the speakers give coherence to their stories. The most basic level of coherence, she finds, comes from the structure of the narrative. The next level is that of causality and continuity. Linde identifies the ways in which speakers attempt to demonstrate an adequate chain of causation for their choice of profession and to explain apparent discontinuities. At the highest level, the stories are shaped by "coherence systems" - explanatory systems of assumptions about the world. Coherence systems used by Linde's subjects include versions of Freudian and behavioural psychology, astrology, feminism and Catholic confessional practice. The most pervasive coherence systems, however, proves to be "common sense": the set of beliefs which are assumed to be shared by any competent member of the culture. Common sense assumptions held by those interviewed include the belief that "You can be whatever you want to be," subject only to personal - as opposed to economic or class - limitations, and that personal desire, rather than obligations, family ties or tradition, should determine professional choice. Linde points out the peculiarly American nature of these assumptions and examines their history within ourpopular culture. systems, including `common sense' and its peculiarly American nature.

This sociological study explores how people create and exchange coherent life stories, and looks at the psychological and social purposes behind them.

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