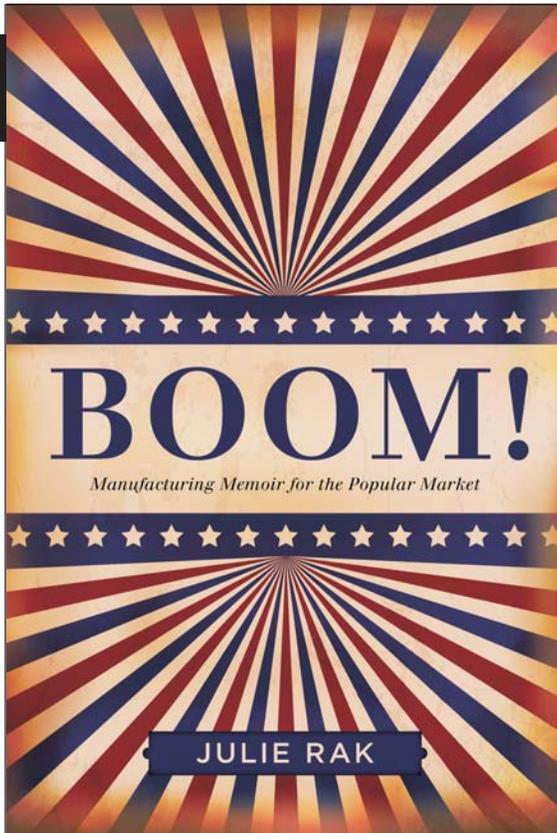


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Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market

Julie Rak

\$29.99 Paper • 230 pp., b/w illus. • 978-1-55458-939-5 • Life Writing series • Available April 2013

This is a smart and original work, the product of significant scholarship and energetic legwork. Julie Rak has looked beyond the texts that make up the memoir boom to the circumstances of their production, marketing, selling, and consumption. All students of the genre will benefit from her clear account of complex changes in the publishing and marketing of books. Her analysis greatly advances our understanding of the rise of the memoir and its important role in our cultural life.

– G. Thomas Couser, professor emeritus, Hofstra University, author of *Memoir: An Introduction* (2011)

Here is the first backstory of the memoir boom in America: who reads it, writes it, publishes it, and sells it, and why it is such a necessary part of the way we live now.

– Gillian Whitlock, author of *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (2007)

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Since the early 1990s, tens of thousands of memoirs by celebrities and unknown people have been published, sold, and read by millions of American readers. The memoir boom, as the explosion of memoirs on the market has come to be called, has been welcomed, vilified, and dismissed in the popular press. But is there really a boom in memoir production in the United States? If so, what is causing it? Are memoirs all written by narcissistic hacks for an unthinking public, or do they indicate a growing need to understand world events through personal experiences? This study seeks to answer these questions by examining memoir as an industrial product like other products, something that publishers and booksellers help to create. These popular texts become part of mass culture, where they are connected to public events. The genre of memoir, and even genre itself, ceases to be an empty classification category and becomes part of social action and consumer culture at the same time. From James Frey's controversial *A Million Little Pieces*, to memoirs about bartending, Iran, the liberation of Dachau, computer hacking, and the impact of 9/11, this book argues that the memoir boom is more than a publishing trend. It is becoming the way American readers try to understand major events in terms of individual experiences. The memoir boom is one of the ways that citizenship as a category of belonging between private and public spheres is now articulated.

Julie Rak is a professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. She is the author of *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Auto-biographical Discourse* (2004), the editor of *Auto/biography in Canada* (WLU Press, 2005), and co-editor, with Anna Poletti, of *Identity Technologies: Producing Online Selves* (forthcoming).

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