



Revising Herself: The Story of Women's Identity from College to Midlife

Ruthellen Josselson

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In 1972, Ruthellen Josselson was a young psychologist fascinated by the riddle of how a woman creates an identity and chooses one path over another in life-particularly in the face of the nascent feminist movement, which challenged as never before the traditional role models of earlier generations. Selecting at random thirty young women in their last year of college, Josselson undertook a ground-breaking study that would follow these women's personal odysseys over the next twenty-two years, from graduation to midlife. What she learned about the ways women reinvent themselves in an ever-changing world is the subject of *Revising Herself*, a myth-shattering look at both a unique generation of American women on the front lines of wrenching social change, and at the conflicts and compromises facing women today. With stunning candor and hard-won insight, the "ordinary" (and anonymous) women in Josselson's study reveal how much more complex and interesting real women's lives are than the one-dimensional stereotypes often portrayed in the media. Dismissing a traditional "stage theory" of development as overly simplistic, Josselson identifies four trajectories that women take from adolescence to adulthood. Guardians are the "good girls"-high achieving and committed to fulfilling their family's expectations, but rigid in outlook and resistant to change. Pathmakers are not afraid of risk or commitment, striving to balance their own needs with others'. The often idealistic Searchers are overwhelmed by choice and unable to make commitments, while Drifters live only for the moment, avoiding choice and an exploration of identity. Reflecting the degree to which women take risks, make choices, and form commitments, these paths form a foundation for adulthood-but they also lead to surprises:at midlife, Guardians seem strikingly able to "cut loose" from earlier traditional patterns, while many Drifters have "found themselves," sometimes

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