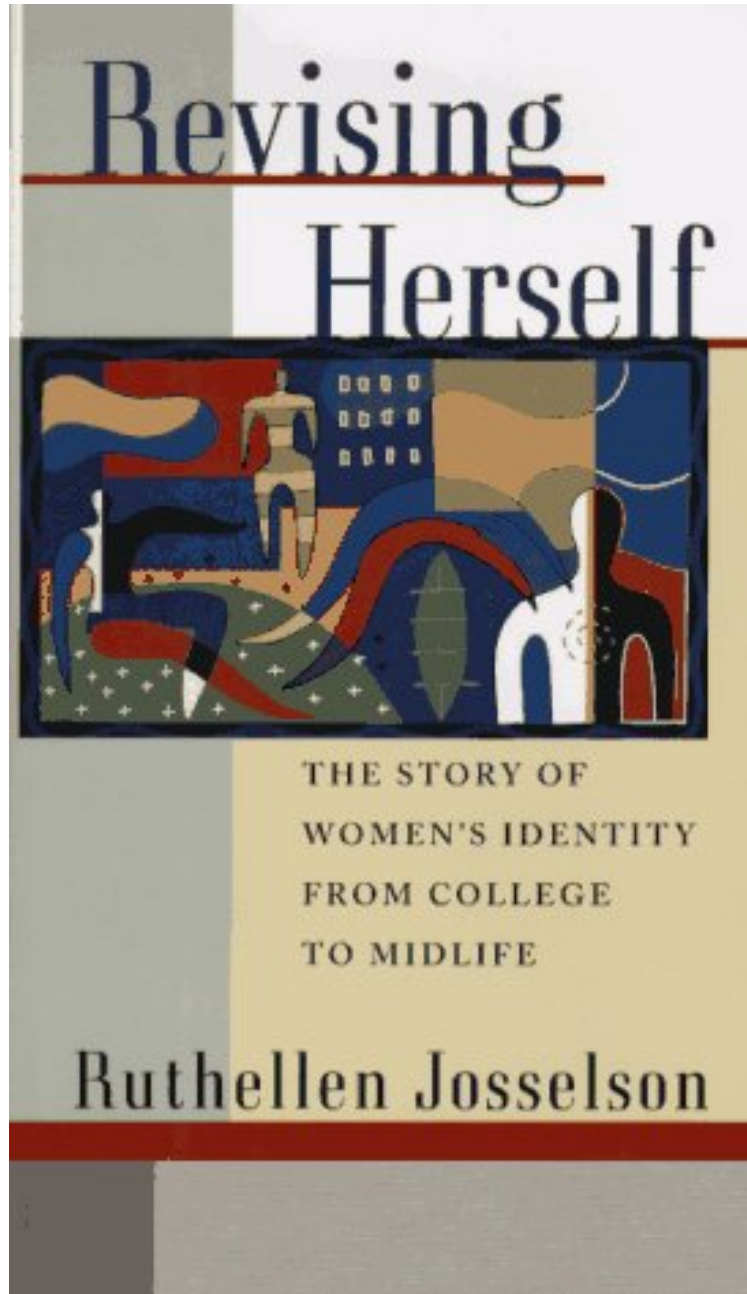


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Revising Herself: Women's Identity from College to Midlife

Ruthellen Josselson

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Ruthellen Josselson : Revising Herself: Women's Identity from College to Midlife before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Revising Herself: Women's Identity from College to Midlife:

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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 in quite traditional ways. And coming of age just as the feminist movement gathered momentum, the women in Josselson's study were the first to confront many contemporary issues not faced by their mothers, or their mothers' mothers: How does an Irish Catholic contemplate an abortion? How does a woman whose parents believe education is wasted on a daughter find the will to apply to medical school? In examining these questions and others, Josselson shows that the forging of a woman's identity--whatever her "path"--is ongoing, a balancing of the need for self-assertion against the equally compelling need for relationships. Women create their identities along the seams of both competence and connection and continually revise what they have made. Allowing women to define themselves in their own terms, *Revising Herself* holds up a provocative mirror in which readers can reflect upon their own life choices. Whether a Guardian, Pathmaker, Searcher, or Drifter, readers will recognize themselves in these women's experiences and gain new insight into how we construct our identities over a lifetime.

From Publishers Weekly
Josselson (psychology professor at Towson State and a practicing psychotherapist) says in her introduction that she hoped to do in text what Michael Apted did in film with his 35 Up series. In many ways, Josselson outdoes Apted in drawing together the experiences of women. Between 1971 and 1973, she interviewed 30 female college seniors then met with them again in 1983 and in 1993. Josselson's important account of a changing generation benefits from her excellent interview techniques, her insight into the ways women edit their autobiographies and the fortuitous timing by which her study tracked the arc of a burgeoning women's movement. The data yields some interesting observations: that childless women (close to half those in the study did not reproduce) found equal satisfaction in other types of connection, and that "Even into midlife, identity is cast against the background of their mothers." Josselson's main point is that, at different times, women recount their life stories in different ways. Many in later life claimed that college had been an active and life-changing experience, while at the time their interviews made them seem passive and uninvolved. At 33, Andrea believed it was acceptable to have extramarital affairs; at 43, married to a different partner, she recalled that the affairs made her feel guilty. The writing is not always perfectly fluid, and as Josselson herself points out, the sample of 30 is far from heterogeneous (the one black participant died after the first round of interviews, leaving only white women) but the information presented here is invaluable. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Kirkus s
An academic study of how a group of women coming of age at a time of great social change have shaped their identities. Finding that Erik Erikson's description of identity formation did not seem to fit her own experience, as a young psychologist Josselson (Towson State Univ.) set out to explore how women accomplish this task. She first studied her subjects, a group of middle-class white women, during 1971-72, when they were college seniors. Using a framework devised by psychologist James Marcia to study identity development in late adolescents, she divided the young women into four groups according to the pathways they seemed to be taking toward adulthood: Guardians, so named because they are protectors of their heritage, cling to the familiar and accept authority; Pathmakers, who are more independent, carefully choose a goal and work toward it; Searchers, idealistic questioners of both themselves and their world; and Drifters, who live in the present moment, counting on life to just happen. Josselson recontacted the women 12 years later and then again 10 years after that, when they were about 43 years old. Here she examines each group separately and provides psychobiographies of several representative women in each segment. After examining their differences, she turns to their similarities and finds that most, although having begun their adult lives in widely dissimilar fashion, have by

midlife arrived psychologically at similar places. For women, Josselson contends, identity rests on a sense of competence or effectiveness in the world, and on a sense of connection with others. In her final chapters, she considers how these issues play out in women's lives, concluding that the most visible revisions women make as they mature are in how these goals are expressed. The psychobiographies make for tedious reading, and Josselson's style is too textbookish to have wide appeal, but her ideas should generate discussion among those interested in theories of identity. -- Copyright 1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "Josselson's important account of a changing generation benefits from her excellent interview techniques, her insight into the ways women edit their autobiographies, and the fortuitous timing by which her study tracked the arc of a burgeoning women's movement."-- Publishers Weekly "Dr. Josselson has written a rare and valuable book, an investigation that is both wise and relevant for life. Of great value to all those who are interested in how we become what we are."--Dr. Irvin Yalom, Stanford University "With insight and sensitivity, Ruthellen Josselson describes a range of different women standing on the threshold of midlife, looking both behind and ahead as they revise their identities. As we turn the pages of *Revising Herself*, we can see the complexity of our own lives. This is an exciting and important book."--Terri Apter, author of *Secret Paths: Women in the New Midlife* "With candor, compassion, and empathy, Josselson traces the course of these women's lives from college to midlife.... Anyone, male or female, who has asked the question 'Who am I?' will benefit from Josselson's penetrating insights."--Salem Press