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Building a Typology of Self-Renewal: Reflection Upon-Life Story Research

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The current paper provides a researcher's account of the life-story method used in a study which aimed to identify patterns of the self-renewal process among women school principals in mid-career. The subjects of this study were 25 elementary school women principals aged between 43 and 52 in Israel. The paper outlines the practical aspects of the life-story method and contributes to our understanding of the consecutive pragmatic ways to implement a life-story method aimed to explore and develop a typology of a yet unknown phenomenon. Further, the ethical implications of doing life-story interview are discussed and presented.

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Introduction

The research described in this paper intended to explore the process of self-renewal among women school principals in mid-career (Oplatka, 1998). The concept of self-renewal could be conceived of as a transitional stage characterized by (a) reappraisal of career commitment and choice, (b) integration of the polarities in one's personality, and (c) modification of one's life structure (Bejian & Salomone, 1995). The renewal seemed to appear in mid-career - a peculiar stage characterized by unique tasks and emotional needs (Hall, 1976; Zunker, 1990), time of stress, burnout and emotional crisis in one's life. However, little insight has been provided for the plausibility of growth and development in this stage.

Analysis of the literature unraveled neither clear definition nor a theoretical conceptualization of the concept and the process of self-renewal. Similarly, no systematic research has been conducted to explore and understand the components and the context of the self-renewal process in mid-career, thereby, a potentially positive aspect of the mid-career was neglected. Thus, the research's purpose was to trace the phenomenon of self-renewal among women principals in elementary schools in their mid-career stage, its development and elements, and its relation to personal, biographic and contextual factors. The consequence was the generation of a typology of self-renewal in mid career stage, resulting from an analysis of the women principals` experiences in this period, based on the interpretations and meaning attributed to these experiences by the women principals themselves.

The life-story seemed to be an appropriate method to deal with these purposes under the conditions of unclear and unambiguous definition of the concept and the process of self-renewal in mid-career. As will be shown later, the decision to use the life-story method in this research was fruitful.

The Life-Story Method

With increasing frequency over the past several years, researchers have begun to use the method of life-story as part of inquiry into the study of psychology and education (Kridel, 1998; Sarbin, 1986). This process, labeled also "the narrative revolution", paid more and more attention to the individual as a storyteller whose personal life-story seems to reflect his self-identity and culture (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 1996). Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone about one's life, but rather they are the means by which identities may be fashioned.

The life-story is one's description of his life course (Sarbin, 1986), (i.e., the story of one's life or what he perceives as meaningful parts of his life). Therefore, the life story seems to be a personal narrative and a story of personal experience (Denzin, 1989). Furthermore, the life stories are narrative accounts delivered orally by the individual himself or herself (Wallace, 1994), which appear to be "an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporate the reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future" (McAdams, 1996, p. 307).

In this method life is reflected as texts of narratives, well known as stories which culturally designed and structured through conversations and discourses. Cohler and Cole (1994, p. 6) wrote:

The life-story is a narrative precisely because it represents a discourse of a particular kind, organized with a potential listener or reader in mind and with an intent, often implicit, to convince self and others of a particular plot or present ordering of experience rendered sensible within a particular culture.

Hence, the story exposes the meaning and the subjective interpretation given by the individual to his life and to various events occurred during his life span (Plummer, 1995). Thereby, the life-story seems to include a subjective, value-oriented interpretation of the storyteller (Wallace, 1994), and the researcher's purpose is to understand the meaning of the life as it is manifested mainly within the storied narrative and less so in the facts themselves. Supporters of the narrative study don't necessarily seek for objective facts, but rather inquire about one's perceptions, values, personal aims and so on, through the method of life-story. In sum, the life-story is the means of fashioning identity, in both the private and public senses of that word, which helps us to understand one's world and myriad identities (Ochberg, 1993).

According to the narrative perspective in social sciences, the individual creates stories, which express his or her self and professional identity, therefore, it is widely suggested, the researcher can use the life-story as a methodological strategy. The story seems to be one of the psychological means to discover one's internal and developmental process throughout the life span (Denzin, 1989), mainly because of the inductive, interpretative- explorative features of the life-story method. These features enable us to explore new concepts and processes on the basis of the storytellers' subjective-interpretative perspectives resulting in the generation of a new theory.

The particular features of the life-story method constitute the base on which the researcher justifies his decision to use this method in his study. In the case of the present study, using the life-story research method was suitable for several reasons: First, the lack of theoretical and

empirical studies relating to the self-renewal phenomenon provided no means to use a-priori hypothesis concerning the relationships among the different components consisting of the self-renewal process, neither to create an inventory to examine this process and phenomenon. Secondly, self-renewal seemed to be a complex phenomenon including many relevant variables interacting with each other, with no appropriate conceptual framework, distinguishing between self-renewal and other concepts, and which define self-renewal's boundaries, processes as well as factors and effects. On the contrary, the disagreement among theorists about self-renewal's components and characteristics resulted in conceptual ambiguity, called for studying self-renewal by means of qualitative research method, which life-story method was one of. Using these means encompassed deep and abundant description necessary to reveal the complexity and contradictions inherent in social phenomena, from a holistic point of view. This view maintained that all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish one element and study its nature without taking into account its linkage to the other elements consisting of the phenomenon (Bruner, 1986; Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Whilst the first two reasons for using life-story method in the study of self-renewal seemed to be appropriate for every qualitative research method, the next two reasons were derived primarily from the unique characteristics of the life-story method. First, this method was more suitable to the study of the life span (Cohler, 1991), because it motivated the subjects to delineate his or her life as a whole. Thus, using the method enabled us to identify periods of crisis and self-renewal process in the women principals' lives, as well as to link between self-renewal elements and contextual, biographic and personal factors exhibited inside the women's life-stories. Secondly, a life-story including a retrospective point of view upon one's life span permitted the identification of one's growth and professional development (Cooper & Heck, 1995; Josselson, 1995). Consequently, the researcher was able to uncover the evolving aspect of the process of self-renewal in the principal's' life and its impact on the self.

Reinforced by these supportive justifications and by the theoretical foundation of the life- story method, the questions now are, how does this method work in practice? What are the practical ways to carry out a life story research? What are the relationships between self-renewal and professional life-story? What are the ethical implications of life-story interview?

The attempt to respond to these questions in the life-story research literature revealed that this literature is hitherto theory-oriented and is rarely distinguished by giving much detail about the practical process of the method. In this respect, the majority of the writings concentrated far more on the theoretical aspects of the life-story, despite the increasing tendency of many researchers to conduct a life-story research, which highlights the individual subjective reality (e.g., Lieblich & Josselson, 1994). Thus, the practical ways of carrying out a life-story research has received far less attention to date. Frequently, two central elements of the method - the open interview and the qualitative analysis seemed to receive more practical-orientated consideration in the literature (e.g., Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1991). However, no specific, practical consideration was given to the unique nature and needs of the life- story interview, analysis and ethical implications, even though these issues deserve of greater mention. The remainder of this paper describes the practical ways of conducting a life-story research method, the research setting, the analysis and establishment of a conceptual typology and the advantages as well as the ethical concerns of the method and the procedure used in the study.

The Research Setting

Every research and specifically a qualitative research are similar to a long hike in yet unknown and unexplored world. Frequently the qualitative researcher is not aware of his research object, nor is he acquainted with the paths to explore the new phenomenon and its features. This was exactly the case at the first stage of my dissertation research.

I knew I was looking for a phenomenon that is more than just the opposite side of emotional burnout, something that is not just work satisfaction or personal growth and the concept of self-renewal seemed to be what I was looking for. Nevertheless, the main questions were still ahead - what is self-renewal? Can it be measured or not? How can one study this phenomenon if nothing is known about its components and context? The philosophy-oriented literature concerning the self-renewal concept couldn't tell me anything about its variables or connection to other concepts, or about its relation to the managerial position. After many well known efforts have been exerted, there was light at the end of the tunnel. The clue for any connection between the school principal's inner life and the concept of self-renewal seemed to appear in the career development literature. Writers in this field (Hall, 1986) have indicated that in mid-career one could turn to an 'orbit' of stagnation and burnout or to a 'trajectory' of growth and development. This assumption was the turning point in the research, because from that time on, the path for creating the research program and the performance of the research was short.

The first issue, which had to be considered, was the sample selection, or in other words, who, from the thousands of women principals, is to be selected for the intensive study? The fact that the study was not trying to prove something, but on the contrary, to identify a new phenomenon, made it much harder to select the proper sample for the study purposes. Additionally, the theory of qualitative sampling encouraged small sample, purposefully selected, including rich cases from which one can fully absorb information relating to the research purposes (Patton, 1990).

Based on the 'criterion sampling' (Patton, 1990), I realized I had to base my selection on the assumption that self-renewal can occur during the mid-career period. Hence, I was looking for women school principals aged between 43-52, holding the managerial position for 8-14 years for the present research. Sampling women principals in their fifth decade was based on findings, which claim that mid-career stage occurs, in parallel with the mid-life stage, usually between age forty and fifty (Tamir, 1982). In addition, sampling women principals, holding the managerial role for 8-14 years, stems from the assertion, that mid-career stage happens between 8-14 years in the same career (Neaopolitan, 1980), meaning, those years in the managerial career per se, without including the previous years in the teaching career. Moreover, I had to sample a highly homogenous group of principals, not only as related to age, gender and seniority, but also to other aspects such as, religious attitude, seniority in the educational system and class and family status. This is of high significance when a researcher is interested in 'thick' description of a phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

However, another question still remained. I had to offer the dissertation committee in the University a number of participants for the study. But as a qualitative researcher who intends to explore a new phenomenon, I couldn't preset a fixed number of participants, for I couldn't predetermine when some clear patterns of self-renewal would satisfy the research purposes.

Therefore, I offered a vague number of participants with enough flexibility to change it during the research process. In fact, the nature of qualitative inquiry in which the researcher analyzes the data during the research itself helped me to decide when to stop collecting data. As I will show later, when I realized I had four patterns of renewal, I felt that the final interviews with the 25 principals that finally participated in the study repeat themselves. In other words, I felt that every new interview only strengthened my classification but did not change it thoroughly.

The next issue that required profound concern was the possible difficulties to get in the field (i.e., having the principals' agreement to participate in such a naturally personal-centered research). In order to cope with this fundamental concern, two sampling plans were incorporated. In the first stage, following the recommendations of the snowball sampling (Patton, 1990), several persons were asked to give me names of women principals who meet the criteria of age and seniority set up in the research plan. I preferred to use the snowball sampling for two reasons: (1) 'cold calls' either through the post or over the telephone have been less successful in organizational research, specifically if one tries to contact the chief executive (Buchanan, Boddy, & McCalman, 1988). (2) The unique nature of the life-story requires the interviewees' co-operation and readiness to report personal and even intimacy areas. Mentioning the name of the informant made it easier to contact the principal and created rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, as the research proceeded and more and more data stemming from the interviews were analyzed, another sampling was conducted - the purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Following this technique, due to the identification of primary patterns of self-renewal, the informants and the women principals already interviewed were ask to contact me with special groups of principals, such as, those who made a mid-career change, those who experienced a sabbatical year, those with high performances and so on. Hence, the scope or range of data exposed is increased and the ability to devise grounded theory is maximized.

The Life-Story Interview Process

The women principals' life-story was uncovered through the open informal interview letting the researcher access the perspectives of the person being interviewed. The interview was a kind of conversation underlying an unintended purpose (Robson, 1993), while its process and content was not a-priori defined and understood, resulting in high differentiation among the various interviews in the research. Using an evolving and flexible process of the interview engendered variations in the interview guide, which means, changing part of the issues that are to be explored with each respondent or adding several issues raised in the earliest interviews. Likewise, the interview guide in the current study, which included a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of the life-story interview, has been shifted four times during the research. For instance, I added questions such as, "what happened in your out-career life during those years?" "Could you give me a metaphor of yourself in those years?" "What did you discover about yourself during the sabbatical year/ the transfer to new school?" and so on, issues that emerged during the research itself, and were not preconceived a-priori.

The aim of the interview was to grasp the principals' interpretations and meaning of their personal and professional life-story. The data gathered were of diverse types, such as, life stages, the dynamic life of the school principals, mid- life career, the school context, role perception and the interviewee's self-concept.

Typically, these issues were systematically organized throughout the interview, and the interview process was divided into four stages in which different issues were discussed. (1) *Opening* - in this stage, taking Patton's (1990) advice, I, the interviewer presented myself and the research topic, and I promised anonymity and a copy of the interview when it would be transcribed. The interviewee was asked to allow the use of tape-recorder for the need to get a complete picture of her life, which is much harder to attain without the use of tape-recorder. Finally, before the interview had begun, I emphasized my deep interest in the interviewee's life-story. (2) *The discussion of career stages* - I commenced by asking the principal to depict her first year as a school principal: her expectations, tasks, anxieties and emotional experiences, issues intended to stimulate nostalgic emotions, which by turn might increase the readiness and openness of the interviewee and create an inspiration of rapport. I encouraged the principal to divide her managerial career span into sub-periods, a division aimed at exploring the ways the women principals structure their professional life-story and their ability to identify defined periods during their career span. Then, her interpretive rationale for the demarcation of the period's boundaries was thoroughly studied. At that time, each period was profoundly concerned and the interviewee was asked about her tasks, feelings, stressful events, experiences, and her out-work world in that period. For example:

What did you most like in that period?

How would you describe yourself as a person at that time?

Can you remember special occasions in that period?

Could you give me a metaphor of yourself in those days?

At the end of this section, after completing the debate of every period in the principal's professional life, the first interview meeting ended and a second meeting was scheduled. Needless to say the researcher had a lot of analyzing to do before conducting the second interview.

(3) *The comprehensive conversation* - once the periods have been described, the next stage was to ask the principals about their interpretations, opinions and feelings in their stories and their school context. The second interview took place one month after the first one. At the beginning I mentioned the topics raised and discussed in the previous conversation and asked the principal's approval to continue. Demonstrating my vast knowledge of the principal's story impelled her to persist and deepen her story to supplementary areas. These areas embraced issues, such as a holistic view upon the principal's career span, the school context, role perception and the self-concept. Table 1 exemplifies some of the questions in this section. The purpose of this section was twofold: on the one hand, the identification of new areas, which were not mentioned in the previous section. On the second hand, validating several central concepts and issues discovered in the first interview by wording different questions relating to these issues assisted in checking consistency and coherency in the interviewee responses.

Table 1. Several Questions from the Interview Guide (Translation from Hebrew)

The Interpreted Career Course

Could you describe special occasions that had a meaningful impact upon your managerial style?

What was the most challenging task you had to deal with in your position?

Who were you before entering the principal's room?

Which periods do you consider as the best / worst in your managerial career?

Can you indicate turning points in your career? Inner turning points?

What about compared to before you had a sabbatical year? / Transfer to the second school?

What is the background of your reflections? Why do you think so?

Mid-Career

Let's assume I wanted to be a school principal, what would you tell me about the principal's feelings after ten years in the office? What do *you* feel today?

How would you depict your life in the last years?

Why do you think, that as opposed to other principals in this time, you are not burnt out?

School Context

Assume I was a teacher in your school, what would your message to me be?

What are the features of your child population?

Can you describe your school? (Size, age, teachers, pupils and so on)

Self-Concept

How would you describe yourself as a person?

Did the managerial role impact the way you perceive yourself?

Who is the most appropriate individual for running a school?

Role Perception

If I was admitted to principalship, how should I behave with the staff?

Do you think you have reached your summit?

What does it mean to be an effective principal?

What is the best metaphor to describe the role of the school principal?

(4) *The end of the interview* - in this stage the interviewee was presented with questions aimed to clarify, deepen and understand some issues of great relevance for the study that were raised or

emphasized in the first interview. It included deep examination of the self-renewal process depicted in the life-story, an elaboration of turning points and exploration of the inner psychological issues of the storyteller. The interview ended with several demographic questions and an appeal to give me names of other principals for the research.

The interviewer acted in every interview as someone who does not know exactly what he needs to know in order to answer the study questions. The interviewee was encouraged to lead the discussion and the interviewer's questions were a reaction to their initiatives. The sequence of the questions in the interview guide was modified according to what seemed to be most appropriate in the context of the conversation, and particular questions were added in response to the interviewee's story. The rapport I had with the interviewee engendered many pages of interview data, which were of great significance to my study. The way of analyzing those rich data will be depicted in the next part.

How the Life Stories Were Analyzed

The analysis of the interview data started directly after the end of the first interview. In that initial time, the questions were; what are the ways for analyzing a life-story? How can we organize the plenty of pages produced by the interview transcription? The answer to these questions was not so easy, because, the qualitative data analysis is guided via the incorporation of objective and subjective modes of analysis. Following the technique's objective instruction was not sufficient and the researcher's skills, imagination and intuition had large impact upon the life-story analysis (Merriam, 1988). In this notion, two complementary methods were operated in the research; a 'thematic analysis' aimed to identify central themes in the life-story (Luborsky, 1994) and 'grounded theory' in which theory emerges from, and is grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The combination between these two methods got scant, if any, reference in the literature, despite its practical contribution to the generation of typology as was evidenced in the current study.

Life-story research produces a mass of data and if taped on cassette or video, they require whole transcription. Transcripts ideally should be processed as soon as possible after the interview so that analysis and data collection can proceed side by side (Plummer, 1995). However, I discovered that it was not sufficient to merely transcribe the interview data as soon as possible, but also that the researcher had better perform it by himself. Despite the overwhelming effort of transcribing so many pages, the time of transcription has yielded the best ideas, the deepest understanding of themes and conceptual categories. One can see this as the most insight- and imagination- evoking action, in which the researcher is exposed to the actual experiences in the interview (voices, tunes, notions etc), and at the same time to the evolving written documents whose figures and signs create additional meaning to the oral words and sentences.

The analysis of the transcribed data involved two phases. The first, which I termed 'the fluid analysis', was conducted throughout the phase of data collection, so it focused on the individual interview - open coding and understanding of the central essence of the life-story. This analysis was essential for it allowed the author to re-scan his interview guide and other aspects of the interview as well as setting the stage for the next and pivotal phase of the data analysis. The second phase of analysis, which I termed 'the comprehensive analysis' refers to the analysis of

the data at the end of the data collection within which the combination of thematic analysis and grounded theory method was operated. This phase will be elaborated here.

The 'comprehensive analysis' encompassed four steps aimed at organizing the data towards the creation of typology of self-renewal process in mid-life. The purpose of the first step was to identify the main themes of the women principals' life-stories. For that reason, I read every interview twice. First, for getting overall impression and 'taste' of the data, and secondly, based on Luborsky's (1994) recommendations, for identifying the common and the dominant sentences, the prominent areas, the central pictures of the principal's life-story and also areas that the interviewee tended to overlook in every life-story data. The outcome of this analysis was a list of sentences embedded in each interview such as:

"The school is vulnerable to the environment because it is the only school around"

"After several years I became more self-confident and people trusted me"

"I came back from the sabbatical year with a lot of energy"

Then I cut down the sentences and comparatively gathered similar sentences under the same theme resulting in the systematically as well as intuitively induction of the main themes and an interpretive biographic graph of every life-story data. This step was not all at once, but on the contrary, it can be seen as dancing with the data until the whole and satisfactory picture of the life-story appears. Table 2 is an illustration of one outcome of life- story's thematic analysis.

Table 2. The Outcome of the Thematic Analysis for One Interview

Interview 12, title: From building and initiation towards burnout and self-renewal in mid-career
The period of building and initiation   In my first years as principals we established the community-related school   We had a lot of success because we primarily focused on the human resource   I devoted a lot of energy to shifting the parents' role perception in school
The time of burnout   Factors: I worked 13 years without taking any break or vacation   Essence: I felt that maybe because I am tired I am not in my prime   I felt that maybe I fulfilled my self in school and I have to go
Reflection   In the sabbatical period I had a lot of thoughts about my future

I wanted to think of my career from a remote point of view

Innovative behavior
Suddenly, I had plenty of ideas of what else can be done at school
The two last years are of breakthrough and innovations

Reframing
I came back more aware of the many things and processes in my job
In the past I tended to intuitively manage the school but not any more
Today I am well aware of the need to look back, to check my activities

As soon as all the life-stories data were thematically analyzed, the third step had begun. This step was intuitively based and was accompanied by theoretical sensitivity. Here I compared the 25 life-story data and connected pieces of data to other pieces of data. In this way I identified 4 patterns of the self-renewal process in mid-career. The step involved gathering the similar main themes together into a common life-story, which constitutes a particular pattern of self-renewal. It is also gained by comparing the themes in order to clarify an emerging theoretical relationship in variables and themes among all the life-stories collected in the study. However, the analysis could not be considered as the end. The patterns revealed were still in its infancy and a deeper analysis should have been done in order to sharpen the differences among the patterns. Here the grounded theory came into the picture.

Needless to say that one cannot determine precise boundaries between the two modes of analysis, but on the contrary, elements of grounded theory method have been conducted simultaneously with the thematic analysis. Thus, the open coding of the data by which the data are broken down, examined, compared and categorized has started before the thematic analysis and helped raise the themes. Still, after the creation of the patterns, following the instructions of open coding, axial coding and selective coding in Strauss and Corbin's (1990) book for each interview entailed more profound understanding of each life-story and validated the thematic analysis. The patterns revealed were similar to those found by the thematic analysis but now it was more precise and profoundly structured.

The last step, the typology foundation, resulted from the constant comparative analysis but also from intuition, imagination and the use of the theoretical sensitivity, which are of great value in life-story research. In my case, the first insight helped to grasp central relationships among the four patterns but the systematic analysis led me to this illumination and systematically structured its ideas. When the typology was inspected, I could start to write the life-story report, which embodies the themes and the women's citations as support for my analysis. But, before describing the outcome, I would like to discuss the quality control strategies used in this study in order to establish quality and trustworthiness in the findings.

The Confidence-Building Techniques Used in the Study

The methods used in this study for establishing validity of the interview process and the data included the methodological structure of the interview format, peer review and structured analysis, all techniques suggested by qualitative scholars (e.g., Johnson, 1997; Seale, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Several concerns about validity of the interview process were considered. First, in order to control for the interviewees' motives in stressing some topics and overlooking others, similar topics were explored by wording the same questions differently during the interview. This also helped to control for social desirability and bias stemming from the retrospective nature of the life-story interview. Secondly, in order to control for any interviewer's effects upon the interviewee, the former spoke little and listened a lot. The fact that the interviewer was a young man in his late twenties, emotionally detached from the mid-career period, also helped to minimize these possible effects. In that sense, given Drisko's (1997) recommendation for limiting the researcher's bias through self-awareness, it is important to describe any potential sources of such bias. In my case, I dedicated a small section in the dissertation titled as "A young researcher interviews women principals in his mother's age". In this section I discussed the potential impacts of my age, gender (Male) and occupation (I am not and I was not a school principal). I indicated the advantages of my personal characteristics such as "I am in the age of their oldest child", "I am not one potential competitor" resulting in less suspicion and more rapport and openness in the interview. I leave the reader to judge any other bias I may have due to my personal characteristics in this case.

Another method used in order to validate the data was a peer review, which in my case were the dissertation supervisors. In this technique the researcher discusses his interpretations and conclusions with other people (Johnson, 1997). Indeed, each stage in this study was fully discussed with my supervisors and they assisted in searching for problems or contradictions in the findings. They also critically evaluated the final report (what Seale, 1999 calls the 'strong version') and asked me to re-examine relationships and assumptions grounded from the data. Sometimes, what I thought to represent the life-story data was questioned by them leading to re-examination of the typology, boundary-scanning of the concepts explored and to re-organization of the final report. Needless to say, the final report also reviewed by those who Johnson (1997) calls 'disinterested peer'(i.e., people who are not directly involved in the research). They were the referees who were nominated by the authority of PhD students. Interestingly, the lack of systematic knowledge about self-renewal contributed to the validity of the study, for "I couldn't find what I wanted to find" which indicates a researcher's bias (Johnson, 1997). After all, as I mentioned before, my dissertation study was like a hike in which the places to visit are not mapped yet, and the explorers should find their way by themselves. It is not to say that I didn't have any researcher's bias resulting from personal views and perspectives, but to say that in the particular case of self-renewal coupled with my personal characteristics depicted before, this bias was limited. Hopefully, it had scant, if any, impact, upon the emergence of the self-renewal typology.

The Outcome: A Typology of Self-Renewal

Four types of self-renewal process among women principals were revealed emerging from two axis - the first is mode of crisis in mid-career (burnout vs. lack of self-fulfillment), and the other is the mode of internal change (basic vs. incremental change). Every type got a name according to the characteristics of its self-renewal process, names that connect the researcher's imagination and the systematic analysis.

The first type, called "the revitilzators" introduced six women principals who underwent burnout crisis, took a sabbatical vacation, in which they experienced some elements of self-renewal, such as, critical self-reflection and re-discovery of their self-identity or re-discovery of their professional identity and commitment. Further, they perceived themselves as undergoing reframing process, in which they changed their frames of reference, from authorative leader style perspective in the past to a democratic one, and reinforced their self-concept and self-efficacy. These processes and experiences were accompanied by feelings of enthusiasm and energy replenishing, and initiation or adaptation of organizational innovations and change to their school. A qualitative report of this type is presented in Oplatka, Bargal, & Inbar, (2001).

The second type, called "seekers of new land", consisted of seven women principals who claimed to have reached their personal and professional peak after several years in the managerial career. The peak led them to feel a lack of self-fulfillment that contributed to their decisions to run another school, usually one with a different organizational structure and culture from the previous school they had run. These differences catalyzed the process of self-renewal, marked mainly by energy replenishing and determination of new tasks in their personal and professional lives. Some of the women principals experienced, following the transition to a new school, some processes of reframing, including changes in their leadership styles and progression toward more coherent and integrated self-identity. (For more details about this type see, Oplatka, 2001).

The third type, called "mountain climbers", presented the story of six women principals who have never experienced any turning point during their managerial career. Rather, their story included self-fulfillment crises, which let them to search for new challenging aims, actions by which the women principals' internal energy was filled. Their renewal seemed to be a result of a consistent search for new pedagogic and organizational innovation projects for their school, a pursuit interpreted by the women principals themselves as a burnout preventing action.

The fourth type, called "holders of the river bank", presented the life-story of five women principals who experienced burnout crisis in mid-career, as well as another innovative side in their professional identity, which appeared to be a contradiction to their burnout feelings. Yet, these women principals gave a unique meaning to their seemingly contradictory situation. They felt burned out, but their emotional commitment to the school members and clients pushed them towards the adaptation of organizational changes, otherwise they might harm the children, who are conceived in the women principals' educational philosophy as the pivotal purpose of their role.

Yet the representation of the life stories in the typology needs further explanation. In order to organize the large data produced by the life-story interviews, I used charts and tables to describe the process of self-renewal and its determinants in each type of renewal, so that the readers have

a clear picture of the processes. In addition, I divided the final report into four sub-sections of the 'findings' section. Each sub-section, which presents one type of self-renewal, includes a chart of the dynamic aspect of self-renewal and every stage or element in this chart is then titled and described in a particular section (Oplatka, 2001; Oplatka et al., 2001).

Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous section of this paper, an important aspect of the qualitative research validation is providing authentic verbatim from the participants' life-story. The principals' descriptions and interpretations of their lives are likely to 'clarify' the author's conclusion and own interpretation of the findings. For example, in order to express the 'identity integration' of several principals in their self-renewal process, I presented the following personal citation of two interviewees:

"I became one person, very mature, with a different point of view, with an entirely different ego perception, and today I dare to do many things I didn't in the past dare to do…"
"I think that today I am an educational leader. I am a leader indeed, not only in school. I definitely feel that wherever I go, I have to lecture and talk and people accept what I say."

I chose this sort of citation because it seemed to thoroughly represent the aspect I would like to stress in their self-renewal. After all, one cannot include all the citations in one's report. The decision concerning which verbatim to include in the final report is a result of the author's imagination, perceptiveness and his or her ability to link between one's personal depiction of one's life experiences and interpretations and the author's own explanation and organization of the data.

Concluding Discussion

With the exception of few writings (e.g., Newton, 1995; Plummer, 1995), the theory oriented life-story literature provides no means for conducting the practical ways of the life-story methods. The current paper highlighted the importance of using particular and unique ways along all parts of the life-story research process and outlines a whole picture of the sequences of the fragmented parts in the life-story method. It elaborates issues discussed in the qualitative research methods, such as sampling, interviewing and data analysis (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and dynamically incorporates them into the particular practice structures underlying the life-story theory and method. Furthermore, a dynamic link amongst the isolated fragments of the life-story research process is proposed in the current essay.

The incorporation of the concepts professional life story and self-renewal seems to be complex and interesting. In a story, events and actions are drawn together into an organized whole by means of a plot. The plot relates events by causally linking a prior happening to a latter effect (Polkinghorne, 1995). But, when trying to explore the concept of self-renewal by means of life stories data, the author found it very difficult to determine whether self-renewal is a syndrome, process, outcome or even an input of other related events in one's professional life-story. Furthermore, the author could not completely differentiate between the elements of the concepts and its determinants.

Needless to say that many concepts in psychology 'suffer' from the problem of loose boundaries and structure, however, in many cases, there is a strong theoretical background to support their core elements, so that analyzing one's life-story might expose patterns of these concepts. The situation is ultimately different in the case of self-renewal for the concept lacks theoretical and empirical background, and is related to many other events in one's life span, such as crises, turning points, transitions and so on. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, life stories as narratives are the best methods to explore one's self-renewal during the life span, for narratives are a way of fashioning identity so that the story is a window on the psychic events and historical periods (Ochberg, 1994). Thus, self-renewal might be transmitted through the immersion into one's identity and past periods and be reflectively developed in the narrative.

A number of important issues emerged which are of great value for the life-story researcher. First, the particular strength of the method lies in enabling the interviewee to raise topics, which are of concern to him or to her, resulting in the construction of a 'plot' or 'storyline' as a basic task of the researcher. By the same token, these topics were not necessarily preconceived as a central issue in the study before the data collection has begun, therefore imagination, intuition and flexibility yield a rich and fruitful life-story in the interview and the following analysis. Moreover, the lack of systematic ways for life-story conduct seems to be an advantage for it leaves plenty of room to the researcher's own tendency and unique way of knowing.

Secondly, consistent with other writers (Buchanan, Boddy, & McCalman, 1988; Procter & Padfield, 1998), one can maintain that the life-story interview contributes also to the interviewees; so mentioning these advantages can attain a better access to the subjects. The current study provides support for that notion because the interview enabled the women principals to reflect upon their life as well as to increase their self-understanding and awareness of past occasions and processes. For example, the women principals used sentences such as, "now I better understand what happened", "this conversation helped me to solve several issues" and so on.

Thirdly, most of the discussion about research and ethics revolved around issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy, confidentiality of data, researcher-subject relationship, and the interpretation of the interview data (Measor & Sikes, 1992; Punch, 1998). However, unique ethical considerations emerge from the life-story interview, mainly, as concerned to the vague boundaries between therapy and life-story research. In the life-story interview the interviewer invites the interviewees to tell their lives and professional stories and encourages them to articulate more fully and profoundly their feelings, past experiences and other emotional aspects. As such, the life-story interview mentions psychological therapy- in the present case for instant, the interviewee's depicted crises, emotions, reflections and dilemmas. Thus, the immersion and digging in one's life may evoke unpleasant memories, unsolved conflicts, and negative emotions in the interviewee's mind, whereas the interviewer lacks the skills and knowledge to cope with them. In addition, there is a danger that the interviewee will retrieve those repressed parts of his or her identity, so he or she may be exposed to its negative impact upon his or her self-concept.

There is no clear answer to the question of boundaries between the life-story interview and therapy. Therefore, in order to minimize the harm and risk to the participants, the researcher should inform them of all aspects of the life-story interview and its reflective nature.

Furthermore, it should be clear from the first meeting that the interviewee is able to withdraw from the study at any point, or at least is able to refuse to elaborate some issues in his or her past. The interviewer should be aware and sensitive to the emotional aspects of the life-story interview.

In summary, the life-stories explorer experiences an internal developmental process in which he unintentionally exposes one piece after another in the life course of the subjects. Several points should be emphasized and illuminated:

- Don't expect to follow strict instruction for conducting your life-story method. It is only in practice that you find out. It is only you who create the method.
- Ask the same issues in different questions along the interview and 'dig' again and again in the uncovered topics.
- Don't try to get in the field without an informant whose name is well known to the subject who consequently tends to let you conduct the interview.
- If you know the answer of your research purpose, don't start the analysis. Nothing new will be exposed during the life-stories analysis.
- Enjoy the research process. Life-story method can provide you with many unexpected and enriching data you have never preconceived to reveal.

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