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LIVING EXPRESSIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS
ON PRIMARY RECIPIENTS

by

Dana Lynn Galbavy

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Living Expressions and Their Effects
On Primary Recipients

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"Living Expressions" are formal events where appreciative feelings are disclosed to a living recipient by friends and/or relatives. Effects of events on the self-esteem of recipients and recipient's relationships with disclosers were studied. Self-esteem and self-disclosure are components of personal and relational health. Living Expressions were expected to enhance self-esteem and personal relationships through self-disclosure. Living Expressions have semblance to ideas contained in eulogies, Gestalt and other therapies and group theories. Self-enhancement and self-consistency theory conflicts were considered. Social penetration theory and self-disclosure studies were reviewed. Eleven recipients were subjects in this multi-case, qualitative study. The combined self-enhancement/self-consistency theory and social penetration theory were supported. Positive effects on self-esteem were negligible, however, the benefits of self-disclosure were substantial and all
relationships were enhanced. Limitations of measures, communication difficulties, and temporal effects, were discussed. Further research was recommended.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Would you like to know how much the people you care about appreciate you, before your funeral? Would knowing such information change how you felt about yourself? Would it affect your relationship with your friends and relatives? Traditionally, eulogies have been reserved for the dead. This study introduces the idea of eulogies for the living, or “Living Expressions.” It discusses theoretical perspectives of self-esteem and self-disclosure related to Living Expressions and the methods used to research the effects these events have on the self-esteem and relationships of people who receive them.

In this paper, the term “Living Expression” is used to describe a formal event whose sole purpose is to gather together family and/or friends in order to express appreciation for someone called a “recipient.” The event participants are called “disclosers.”

Seven Living Expression events (or Living Expressions) have occurred to date. In each of the events, the recipient and two to ten participants have gathered in someone’s home, and each participant has told the recipient things they appreciate about him or her. Participants disclosed qualities they liked about the recipient, positive ways they were influenced or affected by the recipient and characteristics of the recipient which they admired. Each of the seven events were structured in slightly
different ways. Limitations of the study may include the fact that not all events were organized the same way, and this may have had some differential influence on recipient's responses. Because interviews with subjects occurred as much as three years or more after events, temporal effects of the study must be considered. The small number of total recipients and their relative lack of social, racial, and cultural diversity could mean that responses cannot be generalized to a broader community.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Schaeffer's (1995) booklet *A Labor of Love: How to Write a Eulogy*, contains some of the components of a Living Expression. He says that a eulogy should "... primarily convey the feelings and experiences of the person giving the eulogy. The most touching and meaningful eulogies are written from a subjective point of view--from the heart" (p. 5). The same is true for a Living Expression. Many of the questions Schaeffer suggests asking oneself when writing a eulogy also apply, and can easily be adapted, when planning what to express to the recipient of a Living Expression:

... How did [does] this person show his/her love for you and others?...
. What were [are] some of your loved one's most endearing qualities (e.g., kindness, compassion, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, generosity, sense of humor, liveliness)?... If you had to think of one quality that he or she would [should] be remembered for, what is it? Why?... What do you want everyone to know and/or remember about this person? What are some of your fond memories of this person and how have those events affected your life?... What attracted [attracts] this person's friends to him/her? What [has] kept you together all these years?... What did [have] you learn [learned] about life from him/her?
... What did [has] this person give [given] to the world or the people around him or her? (Schaeffer, 1995, pp. 13-15)

Schaeffer (1995) says that occasionally a person will die who has more negative than positive qualities. Even in these rare cases he suggests just being honest about the positive qualities of the person, and not bothering to say the rest. The indication here is that *everyone* has good qualities that are worthy of note and appreciation.

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Books like Schaeffer's are available to teach one how to write eulogies for the recently deceased, and eulogies for the dead appear as pieces of great literature, as small editorials in local newspapers, and even on the Internet. Some Gestalt exercises are designed to facilitate the expression of gratitude and to applaud people for just being themselves (Polster & Polster, 1974). Other such exercises have also been highlighted in books like *Teaching People to Love Themselves* (Peretz-Elkins, 1978). Appreciative Inquiry is a method used in organizational development which confirms the positive aspects and potential of organizational existence (Srivastava & Cooperrider, 1990). However, no research could be found that had been done on the subject of eulogies for the living.

In his therapy practice, Carl Rogers based his work with clients on what he called the "affirmation model." His premise was that people are best prepared to make changes in their life and accept themselves more when their strengths and positive traits and qualities are validated and affirmed (Rogers, 1959). This is also a primary belief behind the concept of Living Expressions.

Several theories could be applied to the concept of Living Expressions. The theory of humanistic psychology as defined by Maslow (1970) involves personal growth and self-actualization. Besides doing one's best to become the most that one can be, Maslow gives as a criterion for self-actualization: "... gratification, past or present, of the basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect, and self-respect, and of the cognitive needs for knowledge and for understanding ..." (p. 150). Severin (1965) says,

(Humanistic psychology) stands for respect for the worth of persons, respect for differences of approach, open-mindedness as to acceptable methods, and interest in exploration of new aspects of human behavior. ... It is concerned with topics having little place in existing theories and systems: e.g., love, creativity, self growth, organism, basic need gratification, self-actualization, higher values,
being, becoming, spontaneity, play, humor, affection, naturalness, warmth, ego-transcendence, objectivity, autonomy, responsibility, meaning, fair-play, transcendental experience, peak experience, courage, and related concepts. (p. 79)

In *Psychology: A Study of a Science*, Rogers discusses a "self-theory" based on the concept of a fully functioning human being. Rogers (1959) says that people are inclined toward actualization, and that they need positive regard as well as self regard. He claims that these needs are best met as a result of the unconditional positive regard received from significant others. When an individual's needs are all met, then the person is considered to be fully functioning.

Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) discuss a social theory of self-identity which considers the concept of *self* as being largely based on social interactions. In this symbolic interaction theory, people develop their self-identity as a result of how they are treated by others. An individual internally takes on the role of another, and then views him or herself from the other's perspectives (Mead, 1934). Therefore, positive reinforcement on the outside should have a corresponding positive impact on oneself and self-evaluation. This theory has been expanded in research which demonstrates that self-evaluations which contribute to self-esteem are constructed through an internal dialogue which not only concerns one's self worth based on appraisal from others and one's own evaluative beliefs (Roberts, 1993), but also on those beliefs based on what people *think* significant others think of them, i.e., the projection or judgments of appraisals (Blumer, 1969; Ichiyama, 1993; Rosenberg, 1986). This reflected appraisal process is modified by research which shows that the appraisals of others exert a greater or lesser influence on the receiver, depending on the level of importance the receiver gives to the role identity, i.e., "mother," "daughter," "wife," "business-partner," which is being appraised (Roberts, 1990). Other studies provide further empirical proof of this (e.g., Baruch & Barnett 1986; Gove, Style, & Hughes,
The influence appraisals have on an individual are further modified by the recipient's current level of self-esteem and the importance he or she puts on what is being appraised. Pelham and Swann (1989) found that importance was only a factor for people who had a disproportionately larger number of negative self-views and who were also very certain about the positive self-views they held. According to this theory, Living Expressions could be expected to have the strongest impact on the self-identity of individuals who have more negative than positive self-views, but who's positive self-views are strong.

It is the conviction of some developmental psychologists that, once established, one's sense of self-worth rarely alters. Erikson (1963) and Sroufe (1978) stress the importance that early childhood experiences have on an individual's sense of self-worth. They believe that it is primarily during childhood that self-worth is determined and influenced by others. Before children develop the ability to make their own self-evaluations, they are dependent on outside sources, i.e., influential others, to let them know who they are and how they are doing. These early affective impressions become the foundation for self-esteem in adulthood (Rosenberg, 1986), and are difficult, if not impossible to alter or influence later on. If this theory were true, a Living Expression would have little or no effect on a recipient's feelings of self-worth.

Two other theories, "self-enhancement theory" and "self-consistency theory," are also relevant and also appear to clash. Self-enhancement theory is described partially as the strong internal desire all people have to think favorably of themselves, or as Smith (1968) says, "... as well of oneself as one can get away with" (p. 368). Self-enhancement theorists maintain that everyone, regardless of self-esteem level, wants to feel good about him or herself and is motivated to move in that direction.
Self-consistency theorists say that people with high self-esteem think favorably of themselves and strive to maintain that perception, however, people with low self-esteem, who do not think favorably of themselves, also strive to maintain that perception (Abelson et al., 1968; Epstein, 1983). The question these seemingly rival theories raise is: How could someone with low self-esteem simultaneously be glad to get positive feedback and feel enhanced by it and try to maintain his or her own sense of low self-worth?

Studies done by Swann, Griffin, Predmore & Gaines (1987) indicate that cognitive and affective responses are both related to positive feedback, i.e., people with low self-esteem as well as those with high self-esteem react favorably to positive feedback and both assume that the feedback is correct. However, the fact that people affectedly feel better, i.e., their moods improve after receiving positive feedback, is not necessarily an indicator of any drastic cognitive changes in self-perception. The conclusion is that affective responses fade over time and cognitive responses have a tendency to remain (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Shrauger, 1975; Swann, et al., 1987). Therefore, a person with low self-esteem would tend to initially feel better about him or herself once positive feedback was received, and they would believe and appreciate the feedback. However, in the long run, his or her general sense of self-esteem would not change much. Roberts and Bengston’s (1993) research supports the combined consistency/enhancement theories. Adults in their study felt less depressed if their relationship with parents was going well, but this did not necessarily make them feel better about themselves. According to this study, a better relationship with one’s parents does not affect self-esteem as much as it affects levels of depression and feeling good. All of the above studies support the
concept that self-esteem is generated in childhood and cannot (easily) be changed. They also indicate that self-esteem seems to be both cognitive and affective.

Living Expressions also share similarities with some group theories. In models of sensitivity training (Golembiewski & Blumberg, 1973) and psychotherapy training (Yalom, 1985), the group process has been shown to be a powerful medium of change for participants. Living Expressions embody many of the qualities of T-groups (training groups) and could be viewed as a form of such. According to Golembiewski & Blumberg (1973), T-group members are involved in: the creation of a miniature society; the development of processes which emphasizes behavioral investigation, exploration and experimentation; an atmosphere which is psychologically safe and which facilitates learning; and, though a professional trainer acts as a loose sort of guide, members primarily determine what is to be learned. Although T-groups are often composed of people who have never met before and are like a mini society in that way, Living Expressions are made up of individuals who are members of the same small community. In some cases some of the participants may not know each other (e.g., if they are gathered to pay tribute to one person known by all), but in many other cases participants will have known each other for their entire lives. The format of a Living Expression emphasizes investigation, exploration and experimentation into a type of behavior and expression which people have not necessarily incorporated in their lives with those that they love. "I didn't know they felt those ways about me," 70-year-old Paul (personal communication, July 7, 1996) said, after being the recipient of a Living Expression from his wife, children, and grandchildren. Several factors contribute to the creation of a “safe” psychological environment which facilitates communication and learning in conducting Living Expressions. Living Expressions are currently only recommended to participants who are normal, i.e., not “sick,” and
whose relationships with other participants are relatively good (these events are not formal therapy, and they should not be considered a substitute for therapy.)

Participants should be briefed beforehand on the purpose of the event and how it is conducted. Each person who is involved must be a fully willing participant. Finally, like T-groups, the results of a Living Expression, are largely self-determining and participants are ultimately responsible themselves for what they gain from the experience.

Rather than being a form of therapy, training groups such as those created for the purpose of sensitivity training are based on a learning theory which contributes to personal growth and development by improving an individual's quality of cognition, clarifying his or her identity and increasing self-esteem (Hampden-Turner, 1966; Blumberg, 1973). It was expected that Living Expressions would contribute to the personal growth and development of participants in ways similar to those provided by T-groups. It was anticipated that Living Expressions could: 1) improve participants' awareness of their feelings for themselves and their loved ones by helping them become more sensitive to the needs of themselves and others; 2) help participants develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and discover new ways of feeling satisfied; 3) help clarify participants' identity by providing positive personal feedback from loved ones; 4) enhance participants' self-esteem and mood as a result of receiving positive feedback; 5) aid participants in the development of a greater acceptance of themselves and others.

Many researchers believe that self-esteem is always closely linked to public-esteem (Lundgren & Miller, 1965; Miller, 1959; Yalom, 1975). Research shows that people rely on each other for approval and validation as well as for confirmation of primary value systems (Yalom, 1931), and that acceptance by others
and acceptance for oneself depend upon one another (Rubin, 1967). The higher value one places on a group, the higher value they will place on what the group thinks, and the greater influence group input will have on what one thinks of oneself (Rubin, 1967; Yalom, 1975). How much a person is affected by group feedback depends on the importance of the group to the individual, the frequency and specificity of the feedback, and the importance the individual puts on the traits and qualities that the group highlights about him or herself (Miller, 1959; Yalom, 1975). Self-esteem is influenced by group cohesiveness and an individual's attraction to the group and other members (Yalom, 1975). Self-esteem is also influenced by group bias (Oaks & Turner, 1980; Lemyre & Smith, 1985). If a Living Expression group is composed of loved ones, follows a cohesive format, and group input represents an expression of high esteem towards the recipient, then it could be concluded that the recipient would have a corresponding high(er) regard for him or herself, especially if group input highlighted factors that the recipient considered important. Polster and Polster (1974) addressed the power of group process and the need for expressions of love, in the following:

People are, of course, taught to say thank you, and they do express gratitude with smiles, return of favors, statements of pleasure, etc. We are, after all, not totally bereft of gratitude. But these routine habits are not enough for the development of the richer experience which comes when someone moves gratefulness into accentuated awareness, especially when it is done with communal recognition and support... (p. 305)

So many scholars have described the need for a high sense of self-esteem, that the concept almost seems universal. This universality is described well by Becker (1968) who considers self-esteem to be a law of human development, and McDougall (1932) who considers it a master sentiment. Self-esteem has been recognized and endorsed as a primary component of human behavior by professionals and theorists in numerous fields such as: philosophy, e.g. Hobbes, Kant, Nietzsche and Rousseau;
cultural anthropology, e.g. Becker; sociology, e.g. Rosenberg; psychiatry and psychology, e.g., Adler, Allport, Horney, James, Koffka, Rogers, and Sullivan (Brown, Collins & Schmidt, 1988).

So many studies have documented the undesirable aspects of low self-esteem (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Fehr, 1990; Paulhus & Martin, 1988; Schlenker & Trudeau, 1990) that self-esteem could be considered a prerequisite for a fulfilling life. Hattie (1992) identifies some aspects of low self-esteem as:

... believing that you are more at the mercy of the whims of others and environment, it is having less control, it is being less effective in engaging others, it leads to difficulties in accepting others; coping with the world and the individual’s place in the world; and it makes it difficult for the individual to predict outcomes of interactions that would enhance coping more effectively next time. (p. 39)

Unfortunately, just because self-esteem is an inherent human need does not necessarily ensure that the need will be satisfied. Internal self-perceptions, beliefs about one’s acceptability by others, and objective indicators in one’s surroundings (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1974; Schlenker, 1985) all come into play in preventing this need from being fulfilled.

In studying the effects of Living Expressions, theories of self-change must also be considered. Pelham and Swann’s (1989) studies show that self-esteem in adults is composed of a combination of people’s positive and negative affective states, their self-views of their strengths and weaknesses, and the way that they frame their self-views. Framing factors include the certainty and importance that people give to their positive and negative self-views, and the differences between people’s actual and ideal self-views. One way to bolster esteem is to re-frame perceptions of the self. Pelham and Swann (1989) give an example of the proverbial ninety-eight pound weakling. They suggest that rather than the weakling trying to convince everyone that he will be the next Mr. Olympia, what he can do is decide that being Mr. Olympia
does not matter. In this manner he can acknowledge who he is without negatively affecting his self-esteem. In the same way, perhaps Living Expressions can help frame people's concepts of themselves in new ways. Through the event, recipients can find out what positive aspects of themselves are appreciated by others, and thus have the chance to reassess and evaluate their own positive values.

Self-esteem depends in part on a person's perception of who they think they are, their self-concept. Jacobson, (1964) provides the following well-rounded definition of appropriate self-image:

By realistic image of the self we mean first of all, one that correctly mirrors the state and the characteristics, the potentiality and the abilities, the assets and the limits of our bodily and mental self; on the other hand of our appearance, our anatomy, and our physiology; on the other hand, of our ego, our conscious and pre-conscious feelings and thoughts, wishes, impulses and attitudes, or our physical and mental function and behavior. (p. 22)

Hattie (1992) suggests that feedback may be the key to changing self-conceptions, and reports that cognitive therapy has proven most effective in this regard. Hattie writes:

Many cognitive therapies aim to integrate thoughts about one's self and replace maladaptive thoughts with more realistic thoughts which are confirmable by one's self and others. It achieves these aims by providing much feedback, helps individuals create situations where they learn more control, and attempts to eliminate negative thoughts that detract from integrating information about the self. (p. 252)

Cognitive methods of change which reinforce positive thoughts and experiences are more effective at producing positive changes in people than either affective methods or non-cognitive and non-affective methods of change (Casey & Berman, 1985; Hattie, 1992; Smith, Glass, & Miller, 1980). Though not administered by "professionals," positive feedback is the primary factor in Living Expressions. Questions about the effectiveness of positive reinforcement given by people who are not trained...
professionals, but who are very close and perhaps influential to the receiver, remain to be answered.

Other questions concerning the ability to change based on group structure also need to be considered. In an evaluative study of rehab patients, Berzon (1968) compared the results of professionally directed groups, self-directed groups who had some guidelines for self-governing, and a control group of members who had no group experience. Self-concept was considerably higher in the professional and self-directed groups than in the control groups. However, a year later only the professionally directed group maintained their positive changes. In other studies of leaderless groups who had some guidelines to work with, the positive outcomes compared favorably with those of professionally directed groups (Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973). How much structure should be provided in Living Expressions, and whether or not a professional guide might be appropriate, are areas of consideration for future studies.

Contradictory theories of self-concept confuse and confound the issue of self-change. One group of researchers maintains that once the self-concept has formed, little to nothing can be done to change it (Maslow, 1954; Rosenberg, 1979). Another group sees individuals as moving through a series of stages throughout their lives, and as they move through each stage they develop the ability to see themselves and view their self-concept, in different ways (Erikson, 1950; Kohut, 1971). Yet another group of researchers ascertain that given the "right" environment with adequate encouragement and support, the self-concept can easily be changed (Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir, 1986; T. Rogers, 1981). Perhaps further research into the effects of Living Expressions will reveal new aspects to the theoretical debates surrounding self-concept and change.
Self-concept and self-esteem are intertwined factors which are both difficult, if not impossible, to measure in traditional ways. Wylie’s (1989) review of ten popular and promising measures of self-concept concludes that none of the tests have been adequately empirically tested, all should be used cautiously, and none should be used as a diagnostic tool. Similar results were obtained in other research on other such measures (Hattie, 1992; Wylie, 1974; Wylie, 1979. Pelham and Swann’s (1989) research indicates that self-esteem is also a complex and multi-determined factor which is not easily measured and which defies any single currently existing theory about its origins. Wells and Markwell (1976) provide an overview of the confounding aspects of self-esteem and the numerous and inconclusive attempts which have been made to measure it. Jackson (1984) suggests that self-esteem cannot adequately be measured quantitatively and that it must be viewed on an individual basis in context of people’s lives. This method is adopted in the study.

Intimacy is another important component of Living Expressions. “Intimacy” is an essential ingredient in a relationship with friends and confidants and is a term generally associated with familiarity, closeness, personalness, and informality (Boyer, Ellis, Harris, Soukhanov, 1983). Numerous studies have shown a direct correlation between intimacy and psychological and physiological health and well-being. Many studies prove that people who have close friends and confidants overcome various traumas more effectively than those who have only superficial relations (Brown, Sklair, Harris, & Birley, 1973; Brown, Bhorchain, & Harris, 1975; Brown, Harris, & Copeland, 1977; Brown & Harris, 1978; Lynch, 1977; Jacobs & Charles, 1980). Brown, et. al, (1975) found that married women who lacked intimacy in their primary relationship had a higher tendency to develop depression than those who were more intimate. Lynch (1977) found that subjects who were divorced,
widowed or never married had higher risks of death from all causes, than persons who were not. Gove’s (1973) studies indicated higher death risks as well as higher incidences of psychiatric disorders among the unmarried. Berkman and Syme’s (1979) extensive study found that mortality rates were lowest among people who had friends or were married or both, and highest amongst people who had few friends and who were not married.

What is intimacy? Waring, Tillman, Frellick, Russell, and Weisz (1980) conducted interviews with a random sample of 50 adults, 24 couples, and 24 clinical couples to determine a general populous definition. They came up with the following:

Affection, a feeling of liking and/or loving the spouse is the most frequently reported aspect of a feeling of intimacy. . . . the next most frequent factor is expressiveness, which involves self-disclosure and listening to the spouse. Sexuality was the next most frequently mentioned factor, followed by cohesion and compatibility. (Waring, et. al, 1980, p.473)

This study focuses on the expressive and self-disclosing aspects of intimacy and attempts to discover how the disclosing of positive feedback which occurs in a Living Expression effects a relationship.

Waring, et. al, (1980) describe the self-disclosing aspects of intimacy as perceived by their sample in detail. They write:

A large segment of the population identified that sharing private thoughts, dreams, attitudes, beliefs and fantasy was an important determinant of intimacy. This concept, best described as “self-disclosure,” was seen as part of a communication factor defined as “expressiveness,” which involves listening to the spouse and the capacity to talk about personal relationships. Self disclosure refers to the process of making the self known to other individuals. Cognitive self-disclosure is defined as revealing private ideas, thoughts, and beliefs, as opposed to revealing feelings or behaviors. (p.472)

Self-disclosure is considered to be a symmetric process between dyads and is comprised of disclosing and being disclosed to. Pearce & Sharp (1973) provide an
interesting definition of self-disclosure which distinguishes it from other related behavior:

Self-disclosure is best conceptualized as a subset of encoding behavior distinguished from three other subsets; non-disclosure, revealing and confession. **Self-disclosure** occurs when one person voluntarily tells another person things about himself which the other is unlikely to know or to discover from other sources. Since self-disclosure is voluntary, it excludes **confessions**, or communication behavior in which personal information is elicited from a person by force, threats or use of drugs, and from **revealing** behavior, consisting of unintentional cues (e.g., 'Freudian slips' or nonverbal mannerisms which express something about the person. **Non-disclosure** comprises those common communication strategies by which persons avoid being known by others. A partial inventory of these include lying (presenting false information about one's self), concealment (deliberately not presenting any information about one's self), and the cluster of behavior Gibb (1964) identified as ‘defensive’ (which maintain interpersonal distance between the communicators by insisting on structure, evaluation and personal disinterestedness). (pp. 414-415)

The self-disclosure which takes place in a Living Expression is both similar and different to other studies which involve this subject. Since the person being disclosed to is generally very well known to the discloser, the information which is exchanged may or may not be common knowledge between the two, and in many cases will probably be both. The information which is expressed is of a primarily positive nature and is related to ways the discloser sees the recipient. Thus it is a specific and perhaps unusual form of self-disclosure which is sometimes reciprocated in context of a Living Expression, and sometimes not, depending on how the event is structured. Like most types of self-disclosure to which studies generally refer (Pearce & Sharp, 1973), the information which is revealed is considered to be honest. Pearce and Sharp (1973) write:

... honesty... consists of descriptions of the speaker's experience which invite the listener to share and respond empathically. Honest messages are not necessarily true—individuals are neither completely nor totally accurately aware of their experience—but they
carry with them the implicit or explicit statement that they are a sincere attempt to make the speaker known to the listener. (p.415)

Although self-disclosure is highly valued, it occurs relatively infrequently. According to Pearce and Sharp (1973):

... inspection of the data from a number of studies indicate that very little disclosure occurs in most communication transactions and quite a bit occurs in a very few. Further, high levels of disclosure occur in specific transactions: participants in highly disclosing transactions are not necessarily highly disclosing when communicating with other persons or with the same persons at another time.

Several writers expressed concern over the infrequency of high levels of disclosure. Jourard (1967:28) believed that no-disclosure is a rule only broken 'when we experience it as safe thus to be known and when we believe that vital values will be gained if we are known in our authentic being, or lost if we are not'. If, as several psychologists believe, individuals 'err' more frequently by disclosing too little rather than too much, this might indicate that members of our society overlearn communicative skill appropriate for non-disclosing relationships (lying, concealment, defensiveness, etc.) and are not taught how to participate in open, disclosing transactions. (pp. 416-417)

According to social penetration theorists, self-disclosure necessitates the mutual disclosure of information or behavior at the same or similar depth, particularly early on in a relationship (Altman, 1973; Vanlear, Jr. 1987). As relationships progress and trust is established, the need for reciprocity is generally thought to decline (Altman, 1973; Altman and Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Moreton, 1978).

"There are times when one person's self-disclosure spurs the other to respond in kind and this is the rule rather than the exception. However, this high degree of mutual involvement may be difficult (and unnecessary) to maintain indefinitely" (Van Lear, 1983, p.315). Social penetration theory, as developed by Altman and Taylor (1973), suggests that self-disclosure occurs layer by layer, from easily accessible surface level public disclosures, to less accessible semi-private disclosure, and finally to deeply private, highly personal levels of disclosure. This progression is thought to
generally—though not always—occur in a linear fashion and to vary in terms of the amount of time devoted to the relationship, the amount or breadth of information which is communicated, and the levels of depth which are reached in different relationships. Several other studies support this theory (Altman & Haythorn, 1965; Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck, & Schulman, 1976; Davis, 1976; Knapp, Ellis, & Williams, 1980; Taylor, 1968), however, later research by Altman, Vinse, and Brown (1981) argues that rather than being linear, self-disclosure is actually cyclical. Instead of constantly moving towards greater and greater depths of disclosure, relationships go through periods of both higher and lower levels of openness. Relationships cycle through times where there are high levels of confiding and openness and times when feelings are more restricted, cautious, and distant (Altman, et. al, 1981; Rawlins, 1983).

Perhaps relationships do both by generally moving towards deeper depths while at the same time going through cycles of greater and lesser closeness.

If relationships typically become more disclosing over time, then self-disclosure between family members and/or friends in the context of a Living Expression should be relatively easy. Disclosing statements would probably primarily differ in their level of depth based on how deeply the relationship had progressed over time. If relationship development is cyclical, then factors pertaining to where in the cycle of openness a relationship currently is might affect a discloser's ability to express. This could easily confound study results. If both are true, then both should be considered.

The ability and willingness to disclose are influenced by many complex factors (See Cozby, 1973, for a comprehensive overview). According to social penetration theory, the amount of disclosure that takes place between two people (or a “dyad”), depends greatly upon personality traits of the individuals, i.e., whether or not they are low or high disclosers. High-level disclosing dyads have proven to reveal more to one
another than low-level dyads, (Jourard & Resnick, 1970; Taylor, 1968) but low-level
disclosers reveal equal amounts of disclosing information when paired with a
high-level discloser (Jourard & Resnick, 1970). High level disclosers elicit higher
levels of self-disclosure from all levels of self-disclosers than lower-level disclosers
(Chittick & Himelstein, 1967; Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971). Altman and Haythorn’s
(1965) research on dyads with particular personality traits showed that people who
were high need achievers disclosed more than people who were low need achievers,
and those who were low-dominance personalities disclosed more than high-dominance
personalities when topics were intimate. When the topics were non-intimate, the
opposite was the case.

Other factors also influence self-disclosure. Disclosure patterns vary
depending upon to whom one is speaking. For example, children are much more likely
to disclose to parents whom they consider to be accessible and accepting rather than
parents who are not (Pederson & Higbee, 1969). In families deemed less accessible,
children disclose more to friends, whereas the reverse is true in more accessible
families (Doster and Strickland, 1969). Sibling status also affects disclosure abilities,
for instance first borns have more difficulty self-disclosing than later borns (Dimond &
Munz, 1967; Dimond & Hellkamp, 1969). A long term study undertaken by Jourard
(1961a) revealed that as subjects grow older, their disclosure to parents decreases
while their disclosure to opposite-sex friends or spouses increases until age forty, at
which time disclosure decreases. Katz, Goldston, Cohen, & Stucker (1963) found that
men who are satisfied in their marital relationship disclose more of their worries and
concerns to their wives than men who are unsatisfied, but this same level of
disclosure does not apply to other topics, and no such correlation was found for
women. Morton (1978) found that women reveal more personal feelings than men,
and Floyd and Park (1995) found that verbal interaction was more important to
depth relationships than to men's. Studies by Jourard and Lasakow (1958)
revealed numerous matters of interest including the facts that: women disclose more
to their same-sex friends than males do; disclosure to one's spouse is higher than
disclosure to anyone else; disclosure to one's parents correlates directly to how much
a parent is liked; and disclosure is higher among whites than blacks. Jourard (1961b)
discovered that religion also influences self-disclosure, for example, Jewish males
were found to be particularly adept at disclosing as opposed to other religious males.
Stamm and Pearce's (1971) studies indicated that people disclosed more when they
perceived that the person they were relating to was also disclosing at a similar level.
However, this perception was not always deemed accurate, and thus disclosure may
be the result of perceived rather than actual mutual disclosure.

Other studies confuse matters further. Waring, et. al. (1980) found that people
who are in optimally functioning relationships are more likely to participate in studies
measuring self-disclosing habits than those who are in average or maladjusted
relationships, and thus many studies relating to the topic are inaccurate. Cozby
(1973) found that studies identifying self-disclosure as a personality trait are
generally contradictory or poorly correlated. Pearce & Sharp (1973) found
inconsistent results in their overview of self-disclosing literature about the differences
in disclosing patterns between men and women. Pearce & Sharp (1973) also note
that although the importance of self-disclosure is generally associated with honesty,
measuring techniques cannot distinguish honesty from other confounding modes of
encoding behavior (p.415).

Self-disclosure is a complex social phenomena and involves many
contingencies. Determining the effects of positive self-disclosure in the context of a
Living Expression is a difficult and tricky endeavor at best. Elements which may come into play include who the disclosure is, who the recipient is, the nature of their relationship, personality traits, backgrounds, social and cultural influences, sex, race, religion, and who is present at the event. Like self-esteem, self-disclosure and how it affects people seems to need to be considered on an individual basis. What actually happens when two individuals interact in a particular way, in a particular setting? Sharp & Pearce (1973, p.412), quotes Toch and MacLean (1967) in concluding that “every human being is a product—a constantly changing product—of the situation through which he moves (p.56)”. What kinds of products does positive, reflective, self-disclosure in a Living Expression produce? This is the question the research has hopefully begun to answer.

In a study done by Duck, Rutt, Hurst, and Strejc (1991), interactions were considered the most important with relatives, followed by interactions with best friend, and then friends. Communication quality was considered highest with best friends, followed by relatives, then friends. If this is true, then a Living Expression would, at the very least, be considered to contain a high quality of interaction and be highly important to recipients and participants alike.

The purpose of Living Expressions is to create an environment where it is “safe” to publicly announce and hear often previously unspoken personal feelings of positive regard for family members and friends. It is similar to what happens at a funeral, only it occurs while the recipient is still alive. It was hypothesized that recipients would feel better about themselves and their relationships with disclosers as a result of receiving a Living Expression.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Collection of Data

The recipients of the seven Living Expressions that have taken place to date include the author and eleven of the author’s friends and relatives. Recipients consisted of three men and nine women, ages twenty-eight to seventy-one, all of whom are white, educated, and upper middle class. Participant disclosers in the events consisted of immediate and extended family members of the recipient in five of the events, and friends of the recipient in two. In most cases, relationships between recipients and participants were relatively good beforehand, though in one case one recipient felt estranged from most of the participants who were all part of his immediate family—which is why he chose to conduct a Living Expression in the first place. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that a maximum of twelve respondents should be sufficient to inform a study. One Living Expression recipient was overseas at the time this study was conducted and could not be reached to participate, therefore research was conducted with eleven total recipients. This sample was purposely selected in order to solicit information from the only people who have ever been recipients of Living Expressions. To some the sample may seem too narrow to generalize about, however Denzin and Lincoln (1994) propose that “... to study the particular is to study the general. For this reason, any case will necessarily bear
the traces of the universal... The researcher assumes that readers will be able... to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences” (p. 202). Although how such generalization scientifically takes place is unclear, it would appear that people naturally extract what is relative and applicable from other’s experiences and compare and contrast those experiences to their own. Future studies on recipients from more varied social and cultural backgrounds are suggested in order to discover whether or not there is a broader appeal.

Most of the quantitative and experimental research that has been done on self esteem in this century has proven inconclusive and confounding (Wells & Markwell, 1976). Trying to break self-esteem down from its whole, into parts, has failed. The subject is far too complex for the reductionistic measures of quantitative review because such measures assume that meaning is constructed the same way for all individuals. The studies—some results of which have been downright contradictory—have proven that this is not the case. Self-esteem needs to be examined from another perspective. As Jackson (1974) says:

We seem to require a more naturalistic approach that can explore self-esteem in a living context. We must examine the themes that constitute self-esteem—the opportunities, the problems, the triumphs, and the defeats that the individual encounters in the development of self—but without losing sight of how these themes are woven together into a person’s own story.” (p. 7)

The study and evaluation of self-disclosure has encountered similar difficulties to that of self-esteem. Both subjects need to be examined from a perspective other than quantitative, analytic measurement. Wells and Markwell (1976) observe that:

“Measurement assumes or asserts certain commonalities among respondents so that it does not have to consider separately the individual meanings of each case” (p. 145). Self-esteem and self-disclosure appear to be subjects that refuse to be reduced to
generalities; they are unique processes and developments, and need to be addressed as such.

With these thoughts in mind, this study was undertaken to approach the subject of self-esteem and self-disclosure enhancement and development in recipients of Living Expressions, from a qualitative point of view.

Though a concrete definition of qualitative research is difficult, if not impossible to find, loosely, Schwandt (1994) says that the two main types of qualitative researchers, constructivists and interpretivists, "... share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (p. 118). Qualitative researchers try to understand experiences from the Other's perspective. Unlike quantitative researchers, they generally do not have limiting a priori theories to prove or disprove, they try to discover what is there to be discovered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

From one perspective this study was not approached from a strictly “purist” qualitative position, because the author was hoping to uncover aspects of Living Expressions which specifically related to self-esteem and self-disclosure. A purist would not dare assume that there were any effects at all, let alone those related to something specific. On the other hand, qualitative researchers are notorious for using multiple methodologies in their quest for true representation. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) go so far as to call qualitative researchers, bricoleurs, or quoting Levi-Strauss, "Jack(s) of all trades" (p. 2). In this way, combining a quantitative-like, a priori theory of effects, with a variety of qualitative methodologies, is actually qualitatively "pure."

In representing the qualitative tradition, this study incorporates numerous qualitative methods including autobiography, biography, case study, interviews, and
ethnography. The research could also be considered to contain elements of feminist and minority perspectives. These approaches have traditionally given voice to those who are not normally heard (Olesen, 1994; Stanfield, 1994), and it could be argued that the voices being expressed in Living Expressions are, by and large, unheard. Though many of the participants might be considered to be in more privileged classes because they have white skin, are educated, and live in more or less comfortable middle class environments, the part of themselves given voice to during a Living Expression are not often either spoken or heard and could therefore be interpreted as a minority perspective. Ethnological based confessional, literary, and impressionistic narrative methods are all used to translate the discoveries made during the inquiry.

Like many qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) the research is interpretive, based on event analysis, and does not provide a systematic model of validation. The data is empirical because it is derived from material experience.

In designing a naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest asking a number of relevant questions:

Is the event represented by a variety of complex interpretations? How much does the investigator influence the interaction, and how much does the investigator's presence cause the results to be inexact? How does the context effect the overall picture? What are the causal factors related to the observed events? What are the values of those observed, and how do those values effect the outcome? (pp. 229-231)

Each of these questions were considered and responded to before the practical aspects of the research were undertaken and throughout the duration of the study. Other recommendations made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were also followed. They suggest determining the phases of the study and breaking these into three parts. In the first orientation and overview phase, "... the object... is to obtain sufficient information to get some handle on what is important enough to follow up in detail" (pp. 235-236). During this phase, informal discussions with some recipients indicated
that the events had changed the way recipients felt about themselves, and that their relationships with some participants had been improved. Thus these were considered important areas to further research. Post-event written data in the form of journal entries and letters were reviewed in order to gain a perspective on the immediate impact the events had. Though availability was extremely limited, these materials provided historical perspective on some events which had taken place two to three years previously. Second, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a focused exploration phase, where information determined to be salient is explored in more depth using such devices as interviews and observation. During this phase, one Living Expression was attended and recipient interviews took place. Third, a member check phase establishes the credibility of the case by confirming (and correctly altering if necessary) the information that has been gathered. During this phase, the information that was gathered and the conclusions which were drawn, were checked with and confirmed by recipients. These phases overlapped one another, and some, such as credibility confirmation, were done throughout the study.

In classic ethnography: “The goal of an ethnography is understanding, and a corollary assumption is that understanding is ultimately useful, even in some unknown or unknowable sense” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 490). In many ways this study is an ethnography because it seeks to understand something—a unique culture if you will—about which it seems important to gain knowledge. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) define several features which they say should be included in an ethnographic study:

- a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them
- a tendency to work primarily with ‘unstructured’ data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories.
• investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail
• analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (p. 248)

This study contains all of the above elements.

Vidich & Lyman (1994) describe the "... ultimate desideratum of ethnographic research" as being "... based on data acquired over the course of rich and varied life experiences" (p. 34). They say it should be "... impossible to disentangle the method of study from either the theory employed or the person employing it" (p. 34). The boundaries between "us" and "them" is blurred beyond distinction. Unfortunately, this ideal seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

In traditional ethnographic practices, the ethnographer enters a culture as a newcomer to its people and their lives (Agar, 1980; Georges & Jones, 1980; Rose, 1989), and then proceeds to attempt to learn as much about them as possible. This is an ambitious prospect in any circumstances, particularly since understanding a culture--let alone any individual or event within that culture--is a never-ending unfolding process (Van Maanen, 1988). Van Maanen (1988) states:

Culture is not something neatly wrapped up and given to people as a sort of gift for living. Rather, culture is earned, something each person must somehow gropingly reach for and recognize on his own. . . . That much of this cultural learning goes on late in life is a sobering notion for fieldworkers who want to understand it all in as short a time as possible. (p. 124)

Critics of traditional ethnography argue against it because they consider it to be hierarchically based, control oriented, and demonstrating a false expertise and knowledge of the people who are studied (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Fine (1994) reveals the obsession researchers have with the "Other," and notes the nearly complete absence of research or reflection done on (or to) the researcher;
"... qualitative accounts of urban and rural, poverty-stricken and working-class, white and of color America flourish... But the privileges, interests, biographies, fetishes, and investments of researchers typically remain subtext, buried, protected" (p. 75). She suggests that one of the current projects ethnographers need to attend to is 
"... to imagine how our practice can be transformed to resist, self-consciously, acts of othering" (p. 75). She claims that the risk of qualitative research is "imperial translation" (p. 80).

These issues have been dealt with by the author's participation as one of the "Others" in the study. The author's perspective is balanced with interviews of other recipients and their visions and "voices." The work contains interviews with some people whose Living Expressions the author was not personally privy to, as well as those whose events were both planned and attended by the author. All interviews were transcribed, and meanings and interpretations were confirmed by respondents. Altheide and Johnson (1994) stress the importance of not focusing exclusively on what is said, per say, but also being aware of more. "Capturing member's words alone is not enough for ethnography. If it were, ethnographies would be replaced by interviews. Good ethnographies reflect tacit knowledge, the largely unarticulated, contextual understanding that is often manifested in nods, silences, humor, and naughty nuances" (p. 492). The author's close relationship to all recipients, plus her experience of being a recipient as well as an organizer and a participant, combine to provide a tacit knowledge of Living Expressions. It also does away with the sometimes difficult problem of representing "Other" (Denzin, 1990; Fine, 1994), because the researcher, is also Other. This installs the researcher within the group being studied rather than distancing her from them, and therefore it is the same as or similar to participant observation.
Case studies make up the bulk of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend case studies:

... because they permit the reader to build on his or her own tacit knowledge in ways that foster empathy and assess intentionality, because they enable the reader to achieve personal understandings in the form of "naturalistic generalizations," and because they enable detailed probing of an instance in question rather than mere surface description of a multitude of cases. (p. 358)

Case studies provide many advantages not available through standard quantitative means of evaluation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) list the following benefits: 1) Case studies provide respondent stories from respondent perspectives, or as Lincoln and Guba state "... a reconstruction of the respondent's constructions" (p. 359); 2) Case studies provide information in ways that are easily recognized, understood, and related to, by readers; 3) Case studies demonstrate the strong interplay between inquirer and respondent and allow the reader to determine what kind of bias the inquirer may have; 4) Case studies allow the reader to test for internal consistency and trustworthiness; 5) Case studies give the reader the "thick description" which is needed to determine the transferability of the study to other situations; and 6) Case studies allow readers to fully understand, and therefore assess, the context of the phenomena being researched. These benefits and points of consideration are all especially important for readers who may be interested in conducting their own Living Expressions. These are the readers toward whom the study is ultimately aimed.

Stake (1994) says: "Qualitative case study is characterized by the main researcher spending substantial time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on" (p. 242). The author personally organized and conducted four of the seven Living Expressions that have taken place. One of those four was an event for the author where participants gathered to express their appreciation for the author and the author.
expressed her appreciation of the participants. In another event, the author gathered with immediate family members and all participants expressed their appreciation of each other, to each other. The final two events were organized and conducted by the author for two extended family member/recipients and in those events all participants shared their appreciation of those two respective recipients only. There was no mutual disclosure of appreciation from the recipients back to participants in these last two events.

The author's familiarity with the topic not only provides tacit knowledge, it also poses problems. The profound and positive impact that the events have had on the author, and the expression of similar positive results from extended family members and friends, are the reasons for the author's interest in the subject. One obvious caveat in the study is that the author's pre-existing personal biases and beliefs about the outcomes of Living Expressions may have excessively colored objectivity and caused biased conclusions about the research. With this in mind, the author has attempted to abide by the ethnographer's ethic which: "... provides the reader with an explicit statement about 'where the author is coming from,' which is the ethnographic version of truth in advertising, and ethical responsibility for those who elect to exercise the social science power and authorial voice" (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 490).

Using oneself as a case study subject—even if it only makes up a small portion of the study—is highly unconventional and will undoubtedly raise eyebrows as well as chagrin among practitioners using more traditional methods of both qualitative and quantitative research. Autobiography is a highly criticized, even scorned, method of research (Smith, 1994). Smith (1994) quotes Pritchett (1977) who calls it a form of presenting "agreeable lies," and Gusdorf (1980) considered it "a sort of posthumous
propaganda for posterity" (p. 288). Smith (1994) raises the question why someone would think that their life was worth writing about, and suggests that there may be some kind of self-deception in such a presumption. Yet he also suggests that all writing is a form of autobiography:

... every text that is created is a self-statement, a bit of autobiography, a statement that carries an individual signature. Such reasoning suggests that all writing should be in the first person, reflecting that individual voice... I almost want to make the case that it's autobiography, all down the line. (1994, p. 286)

Smith (1994) accords biography a more generous position by suggesting that choosing a worthy biographical subject may be intuitive, serendipitous, or fortuitous. It could be argued that the choice of oneself as an appropriate subject of study may also be intuitive, serendipitous, or fortuitous. Smith (1994) quotes Horner (1987) noting a few of the positive aspects of biography: "... fine biographies give us both a glimpse of ourselves and a reflection of the human spirit. Biography illuminates history, inspires by example, and fires the imagination to life's possibilities. Good biography can create lifelong models for us" (p. 294). Good autobiography could arguably have similar results, and if the choice of one's own case study is intuitive, serendipitous, or fortuitous enough, then the one presented in this study hopes to do the same. At worst, as Geertz (1988) says: "no one ever does more than not utterly fail" (p. 143). Though autobiographies are often highly criticized for being unscientific, biased, and lacking subjectivity--among other things--(Smith, 1994), and though the presentation of such a "case" in this study may be far from typical, it is believed to serve the purposes of this study. Stake (1994) says: "Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness. Often it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a magnificently typical case" (p. 242).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) say that: "Qualitative researchers self-consciously
draw upon their own experiences as a resource in their inquiries. They always think reflectively, historically, and biographically” (p. 199). The autobiographical case study is augmented with case studies of other recipient’s biographies and comparisons to their personal stories. Although comparisons tend to gloss over the uniqueness and complexities of particular cases (Stake, 1994), time constraints limited the researcher’s ability to delve deeply into any of the cases. Stake (1994) asserts that readers acquire knowledge through case studies in ways parallel to how they learn from actual personal experience (p. 240). This is of particular value to readers interested in organizing or participating in Living Expressions because reading about other’s experiences and assimilating those experiences will help them prepare for their own events. “... (Researchers) know that the reader . . . will add and subtract, invent and shape--reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it differently connected and more likely to be personally useful” (Stake, 1994, p. 241). A case report is provided to finalize the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that this is the best method for providing readers with an understanding of the subject.

This study incorporates aspects of co-operative inquiry. Co-operative inquiry has much in common with some aspects of certain self-esteem theories. Both have roots in humanistic psychology and the concept that, given the right support and environment, people can overcome limitations imposed on them by early experiences and social programming (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961). Both also contain basic beliefs that a supportive group atmosphere, where open authentic communication takes place, can greatly facilitate this process (Randall & Southgate, 1980; Srivastva, Obert, & Neilson, 1977). Co-operative inquiry is designed especially for the study of people, and part of its method requires that the persons being studied are in full cooperation with the researcher. Reason (1994) says:
... in cooperative inquiry all those involved in the research are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision making contribute to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience, and also co-subjects, participating in the activity being researched. (p. 326)

Though respondents did not provide input into designing or managing this project, per se, they were involved in other aspects of it. Cooperative inquiry requires that both researchers and subjects have experiential, practical, and prepositional knowledge about what is being studied. All respondents have been involved in Living Expressions both as recipients and participants, and most have asked questions, provided insights, and suggested areas of further study. All respondents have both the experiential and practical knowledge of the events which provide the prepositional knowledge, or knowledge “about” the subject (Reason, 1994), needed to conclude the study.

In his arguments for the use of post-positivistic, i.e., naturalistic, inquiry, Heron (1981) discusses the validity and necessity for a researcher to come to a mutual understanding of intentionality with his or her subjects:

When I am interpreting such basic actions [as walking, talking, looking, pointing] in terms of their more complex intentions and purposes, then I need to check against the [respondent’s] version of what he was about, for a person may walk, talk, or look or point to fulfill many different higher order intentions. (p. 23)

Knowing who one’s subjects are, why they do what they do and feel what they feel, is of the highest priority for a researcher. Information without context is meaningless. Such information was obtained for this study via a relationship of mutual trust and respect where the recipients and the researcher had equal access to one another. Heron (1981) discusses the necessity of this type of relationship in coming to accurate research conclusions:

The research conclusions... necessarily rest on the researcher’s experiential knowledge of the [respondents]. This knowledge of
persons is most adequate as an empirical base, when ... researcher and [subject] are fully present to each other in a relationship of reciprocal and open inquiry, and when each is open to construe how the other manifests as a presence in space and time. (p. 31)

Every attempt was made to keep intentions and purposes clear, and to have a mutually agreed upon understanding between researcher and respondents.

Respondents were allowed to read what was written about them, and they agreed upon the descriptions and conclusions which were made. Some researchers argue against such consideration and cooperation. Rubin (1976) suggests that subjects may find reading about themselves too painful, and may superficially agree with the researcher simply to distance themselves from the material rather than to properly evaluate it. Other researchers consider the collaboration a necessity. In Heron’s (1981) argument for the use of language in naturalistic inquiry, he states:

I can use the language to make statements about persons who have not contributed or assented to the formulation of those statements... [But] to use language in this way is to cut it off from its validating base. ... The result is a set of alienated statements hanging in an interpersonal void: statements about persons not authorized by those persons... My considered view of your reality without consulting you is a very different matter from our considered view of our reality. (pp. 26-27)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that all respondents sign a detailed consent form before information is gathered from them, and this suggestion was followed. Building and maintaining trust was of primary concern in this study and was cultivated through honesty, trustworthiness, and total openness about intentions and techniques. Full disclosure of anything respondents wished to know was immediately forthcoming at all times. Lincoln and Guba (1985) say:

... the building of trust is a developmental task; trust is not something that suddenly appears after certain matters have been accomplished ... but something to be worked on day to day. Moreover, trust is not established once and for all; it is fragile, and even trust that has been a long time building can be destroyed overnight in the face of an ill-advised action (p. 257)
Although all recipients were known by the researcher for sixteen years or more and good relations were fully intact with all before the research commenced, every effort was made to maintain trust and rapport throughout the duration of the study.

Interviews were open-ended and unstructured. This was important because of the nature of the information which was collected. In structured interviews, the interviewer plays a neutral role and asks all respondents the same questions in the same sequence (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Open-ended questions were presented in an informal way in order to solicit recipient’s responses to their experience of being involved in a Living Expression. It was important that the conversation and questions remained informal and open-ended because the researcher was trying to maintain a human-to-human relationship with the interviewees, and the author wanted to understand as opposed to explain, recipient’s experiences. According to Fontana and Frey (1994) that is the essence of an unstructured interview and was exactly what the author hoped to accomplish. The approach towards the interviews was feminist in the sense that all interviewees were considered equals, and the researcher attempted to maintain a rapport that was mutually open, sensitive, receptive, and willing to express feelings and emotions. Unlike traditional structured interviews, interviewees were free to ask the researcher questions and to receive honest answers to their questions. Fontana and Frey discuss this approach in the following:

... the researcher may ... “come down” to the level of the respondent and engage in a “real” conversation with “give and take” and empathic understanding. This makes the interview more honest, morally sound, and reliable, because it treats the respondent as an equal, allows him or her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more “realistic” picture than can be uncovered using traditional interview methods. (p. 371)

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) consider this type of interaction a personal experience method of conversation:
Conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow group participants to establish the form and topics important to their inquiry. Conversation entails listening. The listener’s response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview. Indeed, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other. (p. 422)

Interviews with recipients took approximately up to one hour each and most were conducted over the phone. The conversations were taped, transcribed and analyzed. Altheide & Johnson (1994) recommend reflexive accounting as a means of obtaining a “...definition of the situation...” (p. 491). A modified version of their suggestions was employed in obtaining the following “generic” information from each respondent (when such information was unknown): the context, i.e., the physical setting and environment in which the event took place as well as information about how and why the event was organized, i.e., birthday, anniversary, etc.; the number of participants, what relation they had to the recipient, and who organized the event; how the event was orchestrated; the temporal order of who spoke when; any significant or unusual happenings, including how they came about and what the consequences were; and the recipient’s reflected perspective and value given to the event. Other questions attempted to discover the similarities and differences in how a recipient felt about him or herself and his or her relationships, both before and after the event, as well as what other effects the event may have had. These accounts provide much of the “thick description” in the text. Denzin (1994) says:

A thick description... gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process. Out of this process arises a text’s claims for truth, or its verisimilitude. (p. 505)

Once each interview was complete, notes were written up about the interview. Although some researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) recommend not using tape
recorders during interviews because they may inhibit subject’s responses, the conversations were taped in order to retain an accurate and reliable record. Other methods of keeping records such as field logs, diaries, field notes, chronologs, context maps, and sociometrics, were not relevant to the study since information was gathered primarily through conversations with respondents. However, a reflexivity journal was kept (Carney, 1990) which contains the author’s notes and reflections about the interviews, personal thoughts, and feelings about the research and Living Expressions in general. Cross-case analysis and a case-oriented strategy was incorporated to organize and analyze the data. Patterns, themes and negative cases were looked for in the interviews and documentation. Once conclusions were drawn, they were verified by checking conclusions with respondents. When written about, every attempt was made to maintain the integrity of the viewpoint of the interviewee. Interviewees gave their stamp of approval to everything that was written or concluded about them. This prevented the possibility of the author interpretively deceiving herself and future readers into believing that she knew more about the lives and experiences of recipients than the recipients themselves.

Altheide and Johnson (1994) list the following possible communication problems which one should be aware of when conducting a study: “... misinformation, evasions, lies, fronts, taken-for-granted meanings, problematic meanings, self-deceptions” (p. 494). Hopefully, the establishment of trust and rapport helped avoid some of these issues, and the clarification of meanings and conclusions with respondents helped avoid others. Having pre-established good relations should have limited the need for dishonesty, however, maybe in some cases it actually made it harder for the respondent to say things that he or she did not think the author wanted to hear. Lies, evasions, misinformation and self-deceptions
generally have to be recognized intuitively, and errors in recognition and perception may have occurred. This is a limitation of the study. Altheide and Johnson (1994) suggest that the acknowledgment of such limitations is a necessary part of the overall picture: "As we strive to make ourselves, our activities, and our claims more accountable, a critical step is to acknowledge our awareness of a process that may actually impede and prevent our adequate understanding of all relevant dimensions of an activity" (p. 494). This is such a process.

Treatment of Data

Denzin (1989) recommends that after ethnographers have become deeply involved in the lives of their respondents and gained an in-depth understanding of their subject, they then write the respondent's stories in a contextualized way and provide interpretations of the stories. This is the method used by many renowned ethnographers such as Malinowski, Mead, Radcliff-Brown and Bateson. Unfortunately, the resulting interpretations are problematic because they are only interpretations. Some qualitative research methods attempt to overcome this problem by inviting the subject to play a collaborative role by eliciting his or her stamp of approval on everything that is said or written about him or her (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as was done in this study. However, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note: "There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed" (p. 12). They further state that: "There is no single interpretive truth" (p. 15). This indicates that all observations and insights are relativist ontologies which are subject to as many interpretations as there are interpreters, and interpretations change over time. Van Maanen (1988) says: "Events and conversations of the past are forever being reinterpreted in light of new understandings and continuing dialogue with the studied" (p. 118). Thus all reports
are situated in time and subject to (inevitable) change (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

“Knowing a culture, even our own, is a never-ending story” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 119). One of the governing assumptions relative to naturalistic inquiry is that everything will change and the design must be flexible enough to accommodate whatever changes may occur (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In interpreting discoveries, an attempt was made to adopt to the following unconventional attitudes and methods which Denzin (1994) mentions are used in the interpretive community by some scholars:

Interpretation is an art that cannot be formalized. Scholars are increasingly concerned with the logic of the text, especially the problems involved in presenting lived experience and the point of view of the Other. Many are preoccupied with the biases in the emotional stories they tell and are drawn to experimental forms of writing; some reject mainstream narrative realism. It is common for texts now to be grounded in antifoundational systems of discourse (local knowledge, local emotions). These texts tell emancipatory stories grounded in race, class, and gender. Personal experience is a major source of empirical material for many, as are cultural texts and materials gathered via the ethnographic method. More than a few researchers expose their writerly selves in first-person accounts, and many are attempting to produce reader-friendly, multivoiced texts that speak to the worlds of lived experience. It is becoming commonplace for qualitative researchers to be advocates of the moral communities they represent, while attempting to participate directly in social change. (p. 512)

Geertz (1988) says: “... negotiating the passage from what one has been through ‘out there’ to what one says ‘back here,’ is not psychological in character. It is literary” (p. 78). Interpretive and descriptive realism writing styles are used in the text. Interpretations are based on the experiences of the author, as well as the other recipients. This is a multivoiced story. Although every attempt has been made to let the voices of the respondents speak for themselves, it would be foolish to presume that the author can get out of the way completely, especially since ultimately the author is the one writing the text. As Denzin (1994) says, “... all writing is
interpretive” and “…all texts are biased…suggesting that so-called objective interpretations are impossible” (p. 507).

The traditional quantitative positivistic approach to research highlights “objective” methodology as the means to its ends. Madison (1988) explains the scientific approach by saying that:

...one has only to learn the method itself, in and for itself; it is an intellectual technique. Having done so, one has only to apply it to whatever subject matter one chooses; the only criterion in applying the method is correctness of application...one’s guide is the method itself, not the subject matter to which it is applied. (p. 28)

Janesick (1994) calls this process “methodolatry”:

I use the term methodolatry, a combination of method and idolatry, to describe a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told...In my lifetime I have witnessed an almost constant obsession with the trinity of validity, reliability, and generalizability. It is always tempting to become over-involved with method and, in so doing, separate experience from knowing. Methodolatry is another way to move away from understanding the actual experience of participants in the research project. In the final stage of writing up the project, it is probably wise to avoid being overly preoccupied with method...Qualitative research depends on the presentation of solid descriptive data, so that the researcher leads the reader to an understanding of the meaning of the experience under study. (p. 215)

Some researchers believe that focusing too much on methods of obtaining and analyzing data, can conceal the important relationship between the method and the purpose of the study (Erickson 1986; Wolcott, 1988, 1992). Rather than focusing on methods to help build an understanding of the object of inquiry, most constructivists and interpretivists are more concerned with knowing and being (Schwandt, 1994). Strauss (1987) and his “grounded theory” is an exception. Like the proponents of positivism, not only is Strauss (1987) preoccupied with theory building—indeed this is his primary focus, hence the name grounded theory—and analysis, but he also adopts “...a textual style that frequently subordinates lived experience and its
interpretations to the grounded theorist’s reading of the situation” (Denzin, 1994, p. 508). Because the interest of this study rests primarily in relating lived experience through compelling description told by multiple voices, Strauss's approach is inappropriate. What methods are used in research depends largely on purpose, which in turn depends on the epistemological nature of the study (Schwandt, 1994). This study has been approached from the interpretivist point of view which argues that there is no such thing as subjectivity and objectivity, because existence itself is hermeneutical (Ravinow & Sullivan, 1987). All inquiry is interpretive because, as Schwandt (1994) explains:

> . . . we do not simply live out our lives in time and through language; rather, we are our history. The fact that language and history are both the condition and the limit of understanding is what makes the process of meaning construction hermeneutical. (p. 120)

With these thoughts in mind, trustworthiness has been built into the study in several ways in order to provide as much validity as one can have in a study which is interpretive (see Wolcott, 1990, for a comprehensive argument against validity). When each subject was interviewed, the interview was audio-taped and notes were simultaneously made. Afterwards, the information gleaned from the tapes and notes was verified with the interviewees. To further maintain reliability and validity, an audit trail was kept which contains all audio-taped conversations and interviews, transcripts, documentation, plus all notes and journals made during the inquiry. This information is “transparent”, i.e., available for confirmation by others, as long as sources have provided their permission for these to be publicly accessible.

Clandinin & Connelly (1994) say: “. . . a research account looks for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across individuals’ personal experience” (p. 423). Denzin (1989) recommends Husserl’s original concept of bracketing in order to thoroughly examine and make meaning of, the data which has

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been gathered. The researcher followed these recommendations by: 1) finding the most important phrases or statements within the personal experience or self-stories of recipients that directly addressed how participants felt following their involvement in a Living Expression; 2) interpreting the phrases and statements as a knowledgeable reader; 3) obtaining interpretations of the phrases and statements from participants; 4) looking for basic, recurring themes that were related to feelings following involvement in a Living Expression; and 5) providing a tentative statement regarding the effects Living Expressions have had based on the basic, recurring themes which were discovered. The “soft” theoretical hypothesis—that Living Expressions had some effect on self-esteem and relationships—was subject to a nearly negative case analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain: “... if a hypothesis could be formulated that fit some reasonable number of cases—even as low, say, as 60%—there would seem to be substantial evidence of its acceptability” (pp. 312-313).

With all of these “methods” in place, it is important to remember that validity, as well as trustworthiness, are interpretive. As Altheide and Johnson (1994) say:

> All knowledge and claims to knowledge are reflexive of the process, assumptions, location, history, and context of knowing and the knower. From this point of view, validity depends on the “interpretive communities,” or the audiences—who may be other than researchers and academics—and the goals of the research. Validity will be quite different for different audiences. (p. 488)
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Living Expression Events

The Living Expressions on which this study was based, were conducted in several different ways. In three of the events, there was one primary recipient to whom all participants disclosed their appreciation, and there was no reciprocal disclosure. Details on these events are as follows:

1) This one-way Living Expression was arranged by participants Lynn and Marcus, for recipient, Paul. It was a 70th birthday surprise. It was attended by: Paul; Paul's wife, Hellen; his son, Marcus; three of his four daughters, Michele, Christy and Teri; his children's three significant others; and three of his grandchildren. It occurred in July, 1996.

2) This one-way Living Expression was arranged by participant, Lynn, for her step-mother; recipient, Laura. It was organized in response to Laura's diagnosis of a potentially terminal disease. It was attended by: Laura; Laura's husband, Ray; Laura's daughter, Cathy; Laura's son-in-law, Dave; and her step-daughters, Lynn and Janine. It occurred in June, 1998.

3) This one-way event was arranged by a participant/friend for recipient, Ray. The purpose of the event was to provide support for Ray through his new and difficult role as a caregiver for a wife with a potentially terminal disease. It was attended by Ray and ten of his male friends. It occurred in September, 1998.
In two of the other events there was one primary recipient who all participants expressed appreciation to, and in turn the primary recipient expressed appreciation back to each participant. These included the following:

4) This Living Expression was arranged by primary recipient, Ray, as a birthday present to himself. It was organized for the purpose of discovering what family members felt about Ray. It was attended by Ray; Ray’s wife, Laura; his two daughters, Lynn and Janine; and his son-in-law, Marcus. It occurred in May, 1995.

5) This event was arranged by primary recipient, Lynn, for herself. It was a birthday experiment. It was attended by Lynn and nine of her friends. It occurred in September, 1995.

In the remaining two events, all participants were also recipients; everyone mutually disclosed the ways they appreciated everyone else.

6) This mutual exchange event was arranged by participant/recipient, Lynn. The purpose of the event was to bring together family members and to do something nice. It was attended by: Lynn; her mother, Megan; and her sister, Janine. It occurred in December, 1995.

7) This mutual exchange event was organized by participant/recipient, Marcus. Marcus hoped to reconcile with and feel closer to family. It was attended by: Marcus; his parents, Paul and Hellen; and his four sisters, Michele, Carrie, Christy and Teri. It occurred in January, 1996. This event differed from all other events in several ways. First, it was spread out over a weekend rather than confined to two or three hours like the other events. Second, there was a period of time spent on “check in,” where everyone provided an update on what was going on in their lives—in other events this was not done. Finally, although the primary expressed purpose of this event was to disclose positive feelings about recipients—as was the case with all the other events.
and is, in fact, the purpose of a Living Expression—this particular event allowed for participants to disclose negative as well as positive feelings about one another. Recipient responses to this event suggested that the time spent on “check in,” and the revelation of negative experiences that were discussed, provided an extra opportunity for insight into aspects of disclosers which was not revealed in events that did not contain these elements. Recipients indicated that most of the negative things which were discussed had to do with issues that had occurred in the past and because the focus was on positive disclosure, “blaming” did not occur. In the smaller mutual exchange Living Expression between Megan and her daughters, negative things in the past were also discussed. This did not seem to affect the outcome of either event except in terms of all participant/recipients gaining a deeper understanding of one another. Greater understandings also took place in the other events. Differentiation of effects based on how events were structured was not conclusively distinguishable and results pertaining to structure were uncertain.

**Interviews and Observations**

Eleven out of twelve recipients were interviewed for this study. The twelfth recipient was overseas at the time the interviews took place and could not be contacted to participate. Because of the close relationship of recipients to the author, all names have been changed in order to protect those who wished to remain anonymous. All but two of the recipients in these events were participants in more than one event, and three were primary recipients in two events. With the exception of the recipient involved in the most recent event, most recipients indicated that too much time had passed since the event occurred for them to remember certain specifics. Noteworthy is the fact that although some of the events occurred as long as three or more years ago, and recipients often claimed only to recall general good feelings about
what had happened, their responses showed that they often actually remembered a significant amount of detail.

Recipients indicated that the majority of lasting effects relate primarily to relational deepening and appear to be the result of highly personal self-disclosure. Other effects, such as those pertaining to mood, self-concept, and self-esteem enhancements, were generally not lasting, often uncertain, and in some cases, apparently non-existent.

As self-enhancement theorists and any non-masochist would have expected, all recipients enjoyed hearing positive things said about themselves. The combined self-enhancement/self-consistency theory was particularly well supported because most recipients also indicated that the event did not affect the way they felt about themselves. The following are some examples.

"I liked it," Michele said, about hearing positive things about herself in context of the large, mutual exchange family appreciation which took place between her, her three sisters, brother, and their parents. When asked if the event had any short or long term impact on the way she felt about herself, she said, "No."

"I loved hearing the stuff that people had to say to me, about me and about how I was appreciated, and as well about how they appreciated other members of the family..." Christy said, about the same event. When asked if the event effected the way she felt about herself, Christy said, "I don't think so."

Paul was also a participant/recipient in the same large mutual exchange family event discussed above. He was also the recipient of the surprise, 70th birthday Living Expression, which was attended by 12 of his extended family members including his wife, children, children's spouses, and grandchildren. Hearing appreciation at both
events was "Good, of course," Paul said. He also said that neither event affected how he felt about himself.

Of the one-way event held for Laura, in response to her illness, Laura said: "I felt appreciated, I felt loved, I felt seen in positive ways. That was wonderful. I felt very grateful for that process...." Laura did not express any changes in terms of feelings about herself.

Lynn's reflections about the birthday event she held for herself were consistent with the combined self-enhancement/self-consistency theory; she indicated that she felt glad that she had organized the event, but that overall the event did not change how she felt about herself as much as it just confirmed positive things of which she was already aware. She said:

... hearing what they felt about me was wonderful. ... the feeling of love that was generated was incredible. I felt so much love for everyone in that room and I felt so loved by them.... It's extraordinary to feel so loved and appreciated. It gave me a perspective on myself that I was a really valuable person to all those people.... There's a part of my head that says positive things about myself, and there's a part that says negative things. That event ... didn't make me see or feel differently. It just added weight to the positive voices in my head.... It was a confirmation. I was so glad that I had the guts to follow through on the whole thing. It was like having a cheering section. It felt terrific. ... I guess it gave me a hit of confidence. I could do something that was really scary and it could be a terrific success.

In Megan's mutual exchange appreciation with her two daughters, Megan said that hearing positive things about herself was "very nice." Although she did not "... remember anything specific after three years.... my overall feeling about it was very positive." She indicated that the event did not make her feel any differently about herself.

"It gave me ... a nice little ego boost," Janine said, about hearing the positive things said to her by her mom and sister at their small mutual exchange event. She also said:
It made me feel like, wow, I’m a cool person... It just kind of makes you think about yourself in a light... not only do I feel better... and not only am I a really cool person, but these people that I care about feel that way [about me] too... and wow, they brought up some points that I didn’t even know about myself and that’s really cool too because now [they’ve]... added another cool part onto my personality that I didn’t know was there... When you hear that type of thing... it reinforces some of the good aspects of yourself.

Janine could not remember if the event made her feel any differently about herself. This would indicate that her “boost” did not last and suggests that the event did not have any lasting effects on her self-esteem.

The element of pleasant surprise that Janine indicated in hearing certain positive things about herself was a factor reiterated by a number of recipients. A couple of recipients were so surprised by the disclosures they heard that they had trouble even believing what was said. Since most recipients indicated that they did not feel differently about themselves, per se, after the event, the aspect of pleasant disbelief further supports the combined self-enhancement/self-consistency theory.

“When people told me the positive things they thought about me I had mixed feelings,” Teri said about the event with her parents, brother and sisters. She continued: “It felt happy, it felt good. It was [also] sometimes maybe a little hard to swallow. Maybe like, Wow! Really? Do you really appreciate that?”

Christy was particularly surprised to find out several “interesting” things that her parents and one of her sisters felt about her that she had not known before. She discovered that her parents were glad that she had gotten a divorce, and that her oldest sister “just loved me to death” when she was a child. But what surprised Christy the most was “Dad said we were more important to him than his grandchildren, which blew me away. I did not think that at all. It took a long time for me to even believe that was true.”
“Some of the positive things that were said about me were surprising,” Hellen said of the mutual exchange family event with her husband, son and daughters. “I didn’t think my children had as good an opinion about me as they did.”

Marcus, who organized the large family Living Expression, said:

It was surprising because there were expressions of admiration that I didn’t expect for both my lifestyle and other aspects of myself... I thought quite the opposite, I thought that they were things that they [the family] thought very little of... Not just lifestyle, but also equally important, personal traits, personal qualities, like perseverance, like... my idealism, and... pursuing my heart, doing what I wanted to do in my life. They appreciated and respected things that were important to me, [things] I always thought that represented black sheep elements of myself in relationship to the family and to them, [things] that [I thought] were against their grain and were not appreciated. So that was wonderful to hear, to get affirmed in that way.

Megan was also surprised to learn new things. She said:

... the impact that [I had] on the lives of my children was greater than I thought it was. You always know that you have an impact on the lives of your children, but it was interesting to hear them express it... from their points of view.

Ray expressed a similar sentiment about the effect of the birthday Living Expression that he organized for himself.

The importance of [the event] was that it provided a wealth of feeling that I was an important person in the lives of my daughters. I never felt that as tangibly. I always felt that I’d neglected large aspects... I was relieved that I had instilled a positive impact... [I got] a better understanding about how I was loved and I felt it also gave an opening for saying [appreciative things] on a more regular basis.

The effects of hearing what was said at Ray’s one-way Living Expression with his ten friends, were similar to those he had at the family event:

... it was very touching, very moving because I had little idea that I’d had the kind of impact on their lives that they were describing. So that was very curious, it was like a reality check in terms of my public life amongst a group of friends who were outside the immediate family... it gave me a clearer picture of what my role was in that setting... The feeling that I got out of it was one of enormous support, that I had some very close friends that I hadn’t really considered close because I hadn’t
related to people in that way before. So I kind of discovered another level of the relationships that I’d generated.

Although most recipient’s responses indicated that Living Expressions had no effects on their self-esteem, the experiences of three recipients indicate that Living Expressions hold the possibility of changing aspects of one’s self-identity. The following examples lend credence to symbolic interactionist theorists’ reflected appraisal process. For Hellen, Lynn and Ray, the disclosures they heard about themselves were epiphanies of sorts that permanently changed some aspects(s) of the way they thought about themselves. For Lynn and Ray it also changed the quality of certain personal interactions.

Hellen felt that the positive feedback she received from her kids helped her to be less critical and accept herself more:

Mostly the feeling was like, “Yeah, you didn’t do things exactly as we would have liked them to be done, but it was okay, you were great parents and we love you.” That was really very good for me to be able to feel, that it was okay for me to have screwed up... I think I was always harder on myself than I needed to be and I think I still am to an extent, but I’ve learned to ease off and not expect perfection from myself. I think the experience [of the event] was a big part of that.

Lynn related a transformative experience she had in the small, mutual exchange family appreciation she had with her mother and younger sister:

Hearing what my mom had to say was a surprise. I discovered that my mom actually felt many positive things about me that I hadn’t been aware of. Previous to that event I always felt like a loser in her eyes... just to hear ways that she did appreciate me was like a revelation... I discovered that I had a misconception... It has made me feel more comfortable when I’m with my mom, I don’t feel like I’m as much of a screw up in her eyes anymore. That’s made me feel more confident, especially when I’m with her... It changed the relationship for me. I don’t know that she felt that it did [the same for her], but for me our relationship hasn’t been the same since then... I’ve also felt more comfortable telling her how I feel about things, especially more comfortable telling her when I’m uncomfortable with things she says or does. We’re able to talk about things more and work through them.
For Ray, his two events deeply altered the way he sees himself and the way he interacts in the greater community. Ray said of his first Living Expression: “The core of my ability to speak my heart began on that evening.” He also said that the event:

...began a cycle of receiving, to realize that it was okay to receive. That was an important piece that I’d almost rejected. ... I have always had a certain shyness about accepting gifts of appreciation. I realized that people can not give unless there’s someone willing to receive and there have to be both halves to complete that cycle of human affection.

Both [events] were progressive stages of feeling confident. I feel as though I’ve kind of gone through a wall of time and now I feel as though I’m a mature factor in the community and I have to watch somewhat more carefully both my speech and actions, because I feel as though I have an impact on people. So the responsibility of being a community member has increased as a result of that. Then again, so has my impact because now...I’m able to use that influence in a positive and healthy way with consciousness where before it was largely doing good deeds by stumbling into them instead of doing [them] consciously and saying, “I’m a force in peoples lives and I have to be careful and thoughtful about what my presence is like.”

In some cases recipients were strongly affected by the experience of seeing themselves through the eyes of others. In other cases hearing disclosures enabled recipients to gain a new, unexpected, and in some cases, profound, understanding of others, in ways never before grasped. The later are expressed in the following examples.

Megan said of the event with her daughters:

...it was interesting to compare our memories of events and experiences through the years. Some of them were different, some of them one person remembered and another didn’t, some things we all saw the same way, some we all saw in different ways. Sometimes we saw that a little action by one person would affect somebody else very strongly, even though it wasn’t a bit deal for the person doing it. The different degrees of impact that things in our lives had upon each other was very interesting.

Laura’s event, attended by her husband, daughter, son-in-law and two step daughters, made her understand and accept some of her family members in new ways.
In recalling an interaction with one participant, Laura said: “Cathy sort of broke down in a particular way and I basically saw a whole new level of her difficulty. It was very meaningful for me. I understood people a lot more deeply.” Disclosures of appreciation by another family member also strongly affected Laura:

... it had a transforming effect on my relationship with Dave. ... somehow the way he opened up in that particular environment and his sincerity ... That was a very important point in terms of our deepening together. ... It helped me see him much more clearly and actually love him. ... I know there was a turning point there ... I would have trouble with Dave, accepting him, and from that point on I didn’t have trouble at all. The relationship opened up.

In the large, mutual, family Living Expression, Christy discovered things about her brother and one of her sisters in their disclosures which were “eye-opening” for her. After the event she: “... felt good about my ... older sister, we had not had a great relationship.” She also, “... felt better about my brother.”

Teri said, of the large family event:

Seeing [my sister] in a different light and hearing real feelings and not as they would show through the personality, more on a raw kind of level ... made me realize that there were some really common threads actually tying everyone in the family. ... I was able to realize that under the different beings we’re really not all that different.

Hellen was particularly touched by the revelations of one of her daughters in the large family event:

Carrie was estranged from the family for some time, we didn’t feel like she felt like part of it. After the experience, I felt like I was knowing her for the first time. She was open about her feelings for the first time and that was wonderful.

Paul gained a lasting, greater understanding of all five of his children:

I think I got a better understanding of where my children were coming from, which I knew, but it’s always revealing how the same event is viewed differently and not always the way you viewed it. ... you look at an event or something that happened and you feel that everyone sees it the way you do, and all of a sudden it’s completely opposite to what you thought. You bring forth your view and their view and all of a sudden you understand that neither one of you is really a hundred percent right...
and it gives you a better view point of what’s going on... This brings a better understanding between the two of you... The relationships are better, because you get a better view of [the kids'] inside thinking, about how they look at things as different from you. That made a difference. That’s lasted.

In the large family event, Marcus gained a deeper understanding of and appreciation for, a sister from whom he had previously felt considerable distance. Her disclosures enabled Marcus to accept her more and to feel comfortable mutually disclosing back to her:

When it got to my older sister, the one that I had the most uncomfortable feelings and uncertainty and trepidation about sharing with... I think that it had already been unfolding... she shared with... other people back and forth a little bit, and I really got to feel a sense of her that I had never had before, that she was a real person not just some image that I had of her. She had grown and changed in probably equally as many ways as I had over the years, and in my lack of contact with her I had failed to see that, so [listening to her] made me feel really open and vulnerable towards her in ways that I didn’t expect to. I trusted her... she was sharing a lot and talking about herself and openly expressing a lot of caring in ways that I had not seen her do before... I found myself really liking her as a person... maybe that was mostly because I felt approved of [by her] and that allowed me to open up and be approving of her.

Marcus’s experience exemplifies one of the practical “laws” of social penetration theory which states that self-disclosure necessitates mutual disclosure at the same or nearly the same level particularly when relationships are just developing (Altman, 1973; Vanlear, Jr. 1987). In the case of Marcus and his sister, although they’d known each other for approximately thirty-nine years,—Marcus’s entire life, and most of hers—, their relationship could almost be considered brand new because it had never been developed.

Many recipients indicated a tendency to feel that Living Expression events had the strongest impact on relationships which were viewed as particularly problematic before the event. Marcus felt that the mutual exchange Living Expression with his
family improved his relationship with everyone, but he was especially excited about his change in feeling towards his sister—as noted above—and his father. Marcus said:

... probably the most remarkable thing was that I saw [my father] ... as a person in a way that I never had before. He was always just “Dad” and my projections and perceptions of him kept him in a box: “Dad that couldn’t share,” “Dad that couldn’t understand.” ... Suddenly he was this open-hearted, caring person that had a really tender side aside from the logic and the other sides of him, and that was wonderful. When I left after that event ... suddenly I realized I had a Father. A Father that wasn’t like “Father in a box.” ... [He became] “Father as friend,” someone who really cared and that I really loved deeply. ... I think it was the first time that both of us really felt the depth of the mutual acceptance and love and care. I felt like for the first time in my life ... that I had a family, not just a father, but a family and it was wholesome and it was something that I did really care about and they really cared about me. ... It was a real turning point after many years of not really feeling any of those things. ... I think that ... those feelings permanently shifted. ... it’s not as poignant as it was in those moments, but it will never go away. The corners were turned, and we’ll never go back.

In relationships where the feelings of distance were not as great, recipient’s feelings about their relationships before versus after the event were still more positive, just less dramatic. Janine, Megan, and Michele exemplify this facet of Living Expressions.

Janine said that the event “subtly” changed her relationship with her mother and sister:

... I did feel closer to [my mom and sister]. I felt like, what a neat thing, we’ve been with each other forever, for our lifetime ... and ... that made me feel more connected to [them], and I think it opened up a line of communication that maybe was there, but I think it maybe enhanced it, made it easier to just talk in general, and to just to look at [them] and know, they really think that I’m cool. ... I think that initially that effect was more powerful, but the long term effect has definitely been sustained.

Megan did not feel differently about her relationship with her daughters after the event at all. When asked if any changes had taken place, she emphatically said:

“No. I’m very fiercely, strongly, tied to [my daughters], and that tie was not less or
greater afterwards, just there. It's always there, it's always strong.”What she did say the event did was “... reinforce the love of the women in our family, the love and appreciation we have for each other...”

Michele could not remember if any changes had taken place in her relationships after taking part in the large, family, mutual Living Expression. However, she felt that the event provided another step in the development of the relationships in general: “You spend your whole lifetime building a relationship, refining it, and it was just another refinement. Another piece of the experience.”

Something in the study that seemed particularly interesting was that some participants could feel their relationship with someone else had changed significantly as a result of the event, and the other person would not express having noticed any changes in the relationship at all. For example, in the mutual exchange event with her mother and sister, Lynn felt that her relationship with her mother, Megan, had completely changed for the better. However, Megan did not express a similar feeling about her relationship with Lynn. In the large family mutual exchange, Marcus and Christy both felt that their relationship with Michele had significantly opened, but Michele could not recall feeling any differently about any of her familial relationships other than a general sense that they had been refined by the event. Several recipients indicated that their definitive sense of positive change had occurred in relationships which they felt had been problematic before the event. Since in the examples provided, the other parties did not mention a similar sense of disparity in the relationship, it is postulated that such disparity did not exist for them so there was no place for dramatic improvements or alterations in their perceptions, i.e., they had no need for fixing something which, from their perspective, was not broken. As
participants disclosed their inner feelings, recipients understood them in new ways. When misperceptions or misunderstandings were cleared up as the result of self-disclosure, an enhanced feeling of closeness was experienced towards the person who was previously misunderstood. This exemplifies the power and potential not only of disclosing, but also of listening and understanding. Ray shared his experience of this phenomenon which occurred in both of his events:

[I] just felt closer to everyone. What was curious is that I felt closer to them whether they did to me or not. That perhaps, was important, that as I began to have a more independent sense of what my relationship was, so I could feel affection and love and compassion and sympathy for them, without them changing! [Laughs] They didn’t have to be better people or something else. This was sort a secondary effect, it made those feelings more spontaneous in me.

Most of the effects reported as a result of Living Expressions were positive. However, there were some exceptions. The worst experience related by a Living Expression recipient came from Christy, who was involved in the mutual event with her sister, brother and parents. Due to the large group size, a lack of planning, and certain timing issues and restraints, there was not enough time for all participants to express their appreciation to everyone or to receive appreciation from everyone. Christy was a participant/recipient who felt particularly left out. Her presentation was interrupted several times by pizza arriving for dinner during the start of disclosing appreciation to someone, and after dinner she contended with full-bellied, partial attention to her disclosures. Her disclosures were also interrupted by various family members having to leave the event because they had not allowed enough time and had to catch planes in two cases and go home to attend a baby in another. One of her sisters disclosed appreciation to Christy in the car on the way to the airport. Christy said: “The way that I saw it was that I was coming to appreciate each member of my family--which I was excited about--and to be appreciated back. I didn’t feel like I got
either one of those things done.” In the end, although some of Christy’s feelings about some members in her family were more positive than before the event, her feeling about her role in the family was not enhanced:

I think that... it kind of cemented my feelings about where I stand in this family. Not that I’m not important, not that I’m not loved, not that I’m not cared for, but that somehow or another, in some way, I’m just not at the same level.

Christy’s perceptions may have been altered by having a more structured event. Had there been a better level of organization, her impression of her position in the family might have been changed for the better after the event rather than “cemented.” Fortunately, she felt that the gains which were made outweighed the negative aspects:

I love the idea of being with my family, nuclear family as it was.... That part of it was awesome for me. You know, it was the first time that I had ever been with all of my siblings and my parents, without our significant others or our children, in twenty-five years... out of choice... This was just us, and it was just for us.... That whole feeling I think, carried me through and made... all the things that happened, okay, because the idea that we all wanted to do that was so empowering for me.

Marcus also expressed mixed feelings about the event with his parents and sisters. He was glad that he had initiated the mutual exchange, but was disappointed at the way it had been organized. He considered the positive and negative aspects of the event, and said:

I actually felt better about myself in respect to [being] really glad we [had the event].... it was quite amazing that it actually worked and that it happened so wonderfully in the ways it did. At the same time, I also had mixed feelings of feeling kind of at a loss.... I [could have] looked at it [only] from the perspective that the event was kind of clumsy in terms of organization and not everybody had a chance to share with each other, but each time that I thought about that I just had to look at my other mixed feeling about how incredible it was that the event could have happened at all and how much catharsis and healing and wonderful feelings and expressions and sharing of appreciation took place between everyone.
Christy and Marcus’s negative experiences and feelings could have been eliminated if the group had been more cohesive. Their stories exemplify reasons why Living Expressions should endeavor to resemble T-groups as much as possible, as the other events did. Luckily, just the fact of the family being willing to all gather together was enough to outweigh, or at least balance, Christy and Marcus’s negative feelings. If events are not organized and properly balanced, they could conceivably have damaging effects on self-esteem and relationships. Christy’s experiences may also further demonstrate the need for mutual disclosure. She was not able to disclose to everyone or hear everyone disclose to her, and this was disturbing particularly since that’s what her expectation of the event had been.

Ray expressed a similar concern related to the events: “People might be left out and it could actually deepen the chasm in some relationships. If these presentations are not balanced in the event, then I think people can have a negative reaction to it and feel further alienated.” When asked if this had happened in either of the Living Expression events in which he was the primary recipient, he indicated a certainty that it had:

I know that was happening. I let it happen in the men’s group because I felt like I could return that gift to the group over a period of time of telling people really how grateful I was to see them and passing on those qualities. I was aware that this was an hour-and-a-half attention focused just on me to help me get through a very difficult time. I know it exists because I know how some of these men react and they would be very selfishly inclined. They were going to resent having anyone get that much attention.

Ray’s example has to do with participant responses rather than recipient responses, but it does relate to the issue of mutual disclosure. If Ray left the event feeling better because he had heard positive disclosures about himself from his friends, but his friends left feeling resentful of Ray because he got so much attention, the quality of the relationships would not be enhanced.
Lynn told of a related experience with a participant at her birthday Living Expression.

One unusual thing that happened was that afterwards one friend came up and told me that she hadn’t felt like I’d said enough positive stuff about her. She said that I hadn’t said I loved her, but I’d told other people that. She was one of the last people out of nine that I’d shared with near the end of a two hour session. I kissed her and hugged her and reiterated my positive feelings for her. She felt better.

Ray and Lynn’s experiences beg for inquiry into participant responses to Living Expressions. Measures should be taken to avoid participants feeling resentful or worse about their relationships with the recipient after an event. Other factors also need to be considered. Ray’s event was structured so that disclosures were one-way, from participants to him only. Do participants feel more negative after participating in an event with this structure, versus a partial mutual exchange—as occurred in Lynn’s birthday event—or a full mutual exchange where everyone discloses to everyone?

Another interesting fact is that the above mentioned events were the only ones occurring with friends rather than family. This may or may not be significant. The relative closeness of the relationships is another factor for consideration. Since the need for reciprocity of self-disclosure is considered to decline as relationships progresses and trust is established (Altman, 1973; Altman and Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Moreton, 1978), a recipient’s current general level of closeness to the participants in general may determine the best structure for a group in order to minimize potential problems.

When Laura was asked whether or not anything negative had happened as a result of her one-way Living Expression, she expressed her belief that something had. A couple of weeks following the event with her extended family, Laura received what she considered to be particularly negative disclosures about herself from one of the participants. She said:
It felt like some negative stuff got buried and then came up later... We had a very positive experience with the Living Expression, and then a negative experience, and it feels like they were somehow related... On the one level there's a lot of positiveness, but then underneath it was some negativity that wasn't dealt with that we had to deal with later... I think you have to get prepared for the other shoe to fall on appreciations...

It is impossible to say whether or not this later disclosure actually had anything to do with the Living Expression. Perhaps, as Ray suggested earlier, the participant felt left out and resented Laura. Or maybe the participant felt more comfortable with Laura as a result of the event and felt that it was okay to express such feelings. Or maybe the negative disclosure had to do with other things entirely.

Laura's experience raises some important questions. Should Living Expressions be structured to include the disclosure of negative impressions about recipients as well as positive? If so, what is the best method for addressing these issues? As mentioned earlier, the two Living Expression events involving mutual exchanges contained communications regarding negative feelings that participants had with recipients. However, these disclosures were primarily related to issues in the past, and they did not seem to have a direct relationship to current feelings or the overall positive effects of the exchanges. They were also discussed in safe, close, family units—not with people outside the family circle. Future studies may want to explore this subject in depth.

Other angles relating to disclosures in the Living Expression environment were expressed. Teri mentioned that she felt “...a little bit uncomfortable” hearing appreciation in the planned, group environment. Michele and Teri both felt that the “canned” nature of the event made disclosing somewhat difficult. Both participant/recipients had trouble getting in touch with feelings of appreciation that were not spontaneous—it would have been easier for them had they been stimulated...
by the experience of a particularly touching mutual experience that sparked spontaneous appreciation or an event like a funeral where getting in touch with such feelings is easy. Teri felt uncomfortable hearing such expressions, out of context, so to speak. Michele said:

I think it's more difficult to [express appreciation] in a situation... that's canned, [where] that's what the expectation is as opposed to when it seems like the appropriate time... [I said] the things that I could think of at the moment. There may have been more, many more things [which weren't said].

"It didn't come out... easily," Teri said. "... [It was] hard to get in touch with those feelings... It was like, Okay, what do I say? How do I say it?"

This sentiment was also echoed by Ray who talked during his interview about an experience of not being able to think of what to say during an impromptu appreciation with a friend. Although little can be done to alleviate one's discomfort with hearing appreciation in a "planned" environment, providing participants with a template with a list of possibilities before the event, which encourages them to think of the different ways and reasons why they appreciate someone--such as that which Schaeffer (1995) provides for traditional eulogies--could be helpful and is recommended for future events. Though not knowing what to say, or forgetting to say things, is a participant rather than recipient response, the quality of participant's disclosures affect recipient's reactions to those disclosures. It is in everyone's best interest for disclosures to be as smooth, rich and specific as possible.

Not all aspects of Living Expressions are positive, and certain issues must be contended with in the future. However, when implemented with care and consideration, the real and potential benefits of Living Expressions seem to far outweigh the possible risks. There is compelling evidence to suggest that the events can encourage strong positive changes in the way people perceive both themselves
and others, and at the very least the events definitely enhance the quality of relationships.

"... What really sticks out now is the deepening in each relationship that [the event] seemed to generate," Laura said. "What I'm aware of is my perception of each person... I'm much more aware of the love I feel for each person."

Teri said:

The emotional high... definitely adjusted, came back to a normal sort of level, but... [what] has lasted, [is] that feeling of reaffirmation of what that tie is with the family and that feeling of being loved and part of, for who instead of what... I am.

Marcus said that the event made possible a level of communication with his family which was not previously there:

It opened a door to sharing in [a] way that has become a deep need in my life with people. That that could happen with my family, people I would have least thought it could happen with, and that that's an open door now and can take place almost on demand, that they're open to that and see the value of it without being threatened by it, that's become a reality and that's really remarkable to me.

"... I think I feel closer to all of the children because of it," Hellen said.

Paul said:

... the relationships were better after, because you get a better view of how everyone thought of it, how they looked at things. It just brought us closer together. ... I got to say things that I was glad that I did say, probably would not have said them except in this type of situation.

Lynn mentioned how the birthday event strengthened her ties with the participants:

All of my relationships with everyone deepened just from having experienced such an unusual and wonderful event together, and also because we expressed such deep things. I guess the long term effect that I feel about the event was that it really cemented those friends to me. I feel like all the people who attended are family who I'm committed to for life. Even the person there who I felt the weakest friendship bond with, I feel committed to, now, and probably forever.

She said of her two events:
With both events, I feel like if I die or if any of the people who I did these events dies sooner than we’d like to expect, I feel good in knowing that I have told them how much I love them. I don’t feel like there’s anything positive that I haven’t told them. They know.

Ray said that Living Expressions “. . . have had a profound impact on my life.”

In reflecting on the value these events have in general, Ray said:

... you can not go back to old postures, or it’s not as easy to. . . . There comes about an opportunity to change. You can get set in ways of thinking about people. These events help clear your vision, they help set a positive vision and help develop healthy relationships with yourself and others. . . . [A Living Expression] brings out the quality of being human, of being more compassionate, more sympathetic, and of appreciating the fragility of our lives . . . it helps to create an understanding about impacts we have that we would never imagine. It should show us that we really do impact one another and we can do this in a conscious, constant, deliberate way. These are the qualities which get reinforced in a Living Expression.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of Results

The research suggests strong support for the combined self-enhancement/self-consistency, self-esteem theories. All recipients felt good about hearing positive things about themselves, and most indicated a mood enhancement as a result of the event. Most indicated that they felt better because they had participated in the group, however longer term effects on self-esteem did not seem to exist—thus the study also seemed to support developmental psychologists’ belief that self-esteem is developed in childhood and generally cannot be changed. Although most recipients said that they did not feel different about themselves at all after having participated in the events, many were surprised by the positive ways that others saw them. The self-concept of three recipients appeared to have been permanently, positively altered. This may indicate support for the reflected appraisal process, especially since all three indicated that they’d previously felt weak in the aspects which were positively appraised, and those particular areas being appraised were of specific concern to each recipient. The fact that such effects were mentioned by only three recipients however, makes support for the theory uncertain.

Some group learning theory also appeared to be supported. The events proved to contribute to recipients’ personal growth and development in ways similar to those
provided by T-groups. Many recipients expressed how they better understood, and had become more sensitive to, their own and other's needs for enhanced communication and appreciation. Some also felt that the events introduced them to a new way of feeling satisfied. In most cases recipients were made more clearly aware of the impact they have had in the lives of their loved ones, and some indicated a change in their self-identity. All recipients' moods were enhanced, most developed a greater acceptance of others, and some also expressed gaining a greater acceptance of themselves. The group process of Living Expressions provided a powerful medium of change for some recipients.

The fact that the group process did not seem to affect self-esteem is an anomaly. For the recipients in the large, mutual exchange event, it could perhaps be accounted for by the lack of a cohesive format in that group, however, that would not account for the same lack of changes in self-esteem evident in other groups. Miller (1959) and Yalom (1975) say that how much a person is affected by group feedback depends not only on how important the group is to the person, but also on how frequent and specific the feedback is, and the importance put on the traits and qualities which are highlighted in the group. The lack of evidence showing that Living Expressions affect self-esteem could relate to a lack of importance given by recipients to the event itself, however recipients' responses do not support this. It could also relate to the infrequency with which recipients receive specific appreciative feedback, and/or it could be due to a lack of relative importance the recipient gives to the feedback. Interviews conducted closer to the time of the event could reveal more definitively what was said to recipients, how important this information was to them, and how often they received such feedback. Other possibilities include factors such as: feedback coming from family and friends instead of a professional made it less
effective; since the groups were not run by a professional, effects on self-esteem did not last; or, as mentioned before, self-esteem is generated in childhood and therefore should not be expected to change.

Recipients generally seemed to have been most powerfully affected in areas relating to themselves and others when: they felt particularly distant or had problems with certain participants; there were aspects of themselves which they felt others did not understand or appreciate; participants commented upon positive aspects of themselves which recipients were not aware of; recipients learned something which made them understand participants better. Since some of these occurrences took place as a result of disclosures during all Living Expressions, all recipients felt they had benefited in some way from the events. Relationships which recipients did not feel were much affected by the events primarily appeared to be those which recipients already considered close before the event.

Many recipients felt that a new and improved understanding of a particular participant changed their relationship with that person. However, a reciprocal feeling was rarely communicated. It was suggested that when a recipient felt prior distance from a participant, the process of participant disclosure created a new understanding and feeling of acceptance within the recipient which caused the recipient to then feel closer to the participant. A mutual feeling of resolve was not experienced by the participant because he or she did not have a previous sense of distance. This kind of understanding sometimes gave the whole event particular significance to recipients, however it was not verified whether or not all recipients who strongly felt this way towards a participant had previous feelings of distance.

Support was found for the concepts of social penetration theory which suggest that relationships both deepen over time and are enhanced by the disclosure of
personal information. All recipients, without exception, felt that the event had some kind of positive impact on their relationships with some or all participants. The disclosures which took place had long term effects, the least of which included, strengthened, reinforced, or deepened relationships with other participants. Statements by most recipients indicated that disclosing positive feelings to family members and was easy, though for some it was hard to think of the right words to say in the event context. The information which was obtained about how people felt about their relationships before and after the event, indicated that most relationships were deepened as a result of the disclosures that took place--regardless of how close the relationship was before the event. This supported concepts about the linear and continually deepening nature of self-disclosure. Support for the cyclical nature of self-disclosure was not confirmed during the study. However, informal discussions with recipients, and experiences of the researcher cum recipient, demonstrate that interactions with participants--both before and after the event--have cycled through times of increasing and decreasing openness. This experience suggests that self-disclosure is both linear and cyclical.

Recommendations

In the future, it is recommended that interviews take place as soon after events as possible. This would help determine whether or not there were more immediate effects which could not be determined in this study due to the time which had passed since the events took place. It would also help lessen occurrences of recipients and participants forgetting what had taken place at the events. Future studies should distinguish whether the events have more or less impact depending upon if they are conducted around one-way or mutual exchange disclosures. Interviews are recommended with participants in order to discover differences in participant reactions.
depending on how events are conducted. This type of investigation would help determine the most effective method of conducting events and would determine the risks, or lack thereof, for each method. It would be interesting to determine if there are differences in effects depending on whether participants are family members or friends. It would also be interesting to discover if effects are more poignant or meaningful for a person who organized an event and was also the recipient, versus a person who did not organize the event but who was a recipient. The effects of participating in, or being the recipient of, more than one event should be examined, as should the regularity with which events should take place for maximum and ongoing benefits. It is suggested that all future events be well-organized and have a specific structure which is followed. This is especially important in larger gatherings in order to prevent people from accidentally being left out of the appreciation process. A template containing questions--such as those recommended by Schaeffer (1995)--that get people thinking about specific ways and reasons why they appreciate someone should also be provided to participants before the event. This could help prevent participants from not knowing what to say to recipients on the one hand, and from recipients feeling under-appreciated by participants who can not think of much to say on the other. The expression of negative self-disclosures in events should be further considered and perhaps somehow effectively incorporated. Finally, it is recommended that future studies of Living Expressions include more diverse respondents, and that it be determined whether or not these events can or should be implemented by individuals with more dysfunctional relationships.

Conclusions

This research contains temporal reflections and responses about the effects that Living Expressions have had on eleven recipients including the author. Past and
future studies of the same topic, even with the same respondents, would undoubtedly reveal different information. The participants in the inquiry did, in the majority of cases, respond to questions related to Living Expression events which took place two to three years previously. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) write: “Memory, unaided by field texts—for instance, a child’s journal; parents’, friends’, and other’s remembrances; photographs of the child—has an uncertain status and, for the most part, expresses a current voice rather than a historical voice” (p. 424). The problem with this is that the information uncovered at present may reflect primarily longer, rather than shorter term effects of Living Expressions. Of course, present-day discoveries also cannot account for changes in perception that may happen in the future, and continuing studies will have to be made to update all information in order for it to remain as current as possible. Denzin (1994) says: “... no permanent telling of a story can be given. There are only always different versions of different, not the same, stories, even when the same site is studied” (p. 506).

At the time of the interviews, respondents indicated a strong positive response to Living Expressions and felt that the events had enhanced different aspects of their lives in specific and significant ways. May the stories about Living Expressions multiply and grow.
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