

Emotional Development in Adolescence: What can be Learned From a High School Theater Program?

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Grounded-theory analyses were used to formulate propositions regarding the processes of adolescent emotional development. Progress in understanding this difficult topic requires close examination of emotional experience in context, and to do this the authors drew on qualitative data collected over the course of a high school theater production. Participants' (ages 14–17) accounts of experiences in this setting demonstrated their capacity to actively extract emotional knowledge and to develop strategies for managing emotions. These accounts suggested that youth's repeated "hot" experience of unfolding emotional episodes in the setting provided material for this active process of learning. Youth also learned by drawing on and internalizing the emotion culture of the setting, which provided concepts, strategies, and tools for managing emotional episodes.

Being in the program helped you not only identify what the emotion was but helped you learn how to effectively use that emotion and allow that emotion to exist without negative consequences.

—A cast member describing what she learned in a theater program.

What does positive emotional development look like in adolescence? Research shows that adolescents experience wide fluctuations in their daily emotional states (Larson & Richards, 1994; Larson & Sheeber, in press), and learning to manage these emotions is vital to their eventual effectiveness and well-being in adult work, parenting, and other roles (Härtel, Zerbe, & Ashkanasy, 2005; Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). Yet, although progress has been made since Hauser and Safyer (1994) described the topic of adolescent emotional development as "virtually uncharted territory" (p. 488), knowledge about emotion in adolescence is comparatively limited (Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2006), particularly with regard to the processes of emotional development as they are experienced by adolescents.

One explanation may be that emotional development presents adolescents (and by extension scholars) with formidable tasks. In trying to understand their daily emotional fluctuations teens face challenging puzzles, such as the relationship between sub-

jective and objective reality. Adolescents are found to experience their emotions as intensely personal—as core to who they are (Haviland, Davidson, Reutsch, Gebelt & Lancelot, 1994)—yet they must figure out the role of abstract social, psychological, and physiological processes in influencing them (Fischer, Shaver, & Carnochan, 1989, 1990). Emotions serve vital functions for individuals and groups: They provide information, help motivate and direct attention, and facilitate group relationships (Lewis & Haviland-Jones, 2000). Yet learning to manage emotions requires that teens learn to distinguish how and when emotions are functional from ways in which they can turn your world upside down, mislead, and have dysfunctional consequences (Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999).

To get a handle on this challenging topic, we focused on teenagers' emotional learning in one experiential setting, a high school drama program. Numerous scholars have argued that emotional development needs to be understood in relation to the real-life cultural contexts in which young people experience emotions (Haviland & Kramer, 1991; Saarni et al., 2006; Zeidner, Matthews, Roberts, & MacCann, 2003). Emotions occur in episodes (in what Izard, 2002, p. 806, calls "event-emotion-action sequences"), and the unfolding of these episodes is shaped by the meanings, goals, activities, and demands that exist in specific interactional settings (Averill, 1980; Frijda, 1993). Therefore, knowledge of emotional development requires understanding how these elements of settings interact with young people's emotional experience and learning.

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We chose to focus on an organized youth program because these settings are thought to provide special conditions for fostering psychosocial development (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). Indeed, teens in two surveys reported more frequent learning experiences related to emotions in youth programs than in school classes and leisure interactions with friends (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006), with emotional learning reported somewhat more frequently in performance arts programs (Hansen, 2006).

In this theory-generating essay we assess this one youth program, which appeared to provide a particularly rich microcosm for emotional experiences and development. Our goals were to develop theoretical concepts about processes of adolescent emotional development and how settings can facilitate these processes. Because we sought preliminary ideas about complex contextual processes from the vantage point of the participants, we employed qualitative discovery research methods (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; National Institutes of Mental Health Consortium of Editors on Development and Psychopathology, 1999).

Adolescent Emotional Development

Research with younger children shows that by the onset of the teenage years, most youth have amassed a relatively large body of emotion knowledge and competencies. They have an extensive vocabulary of emotion terms and are developing skills to understand the relationships between emotions and the situations that elicit them. They demonstrate abilities to infer others' emotions and consider subcultural scripts in emotional appraisals; they become more able to alter their expression of emotions in response to situational demands and conceive strategies for emotional self-control (Harris, 1989; Marriage & Cummins, 2004; Nannis & Cowan, 1987; Saarni et al., 2006).

Adolescence is thought to bring new potentials for emotional knowledge and management skills. A central feature of teenagers' new knowledge is believed to be a capacity for understanding emotions in relationship to complex interacting systems (Fischer et al., 1989, 1990). These include interacting interpersonal systems (self, others, social groups), cultural systems, and internal biopsychosocial systems. Adolescents' ability to reason about these different systems potentially permits them, for example, to differentiate people's momentary emotions from their personalities, to understand the cultural conditions surrounding complex interpersonal emotions (e.g., pride, shame, embarrassment), and to assess better the

causes and effects of emotions (Fischer et al., 1989; Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003; Saarni, 1999; Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, & Stegall, 2006).

In conjunction with this greater knowledge, it is believed that adolescents develop more executive control in the management of emotions in self and interpersonal systems (Keating, 2004; Zeidner et al., 2003), a developmental change that may be partly afforded by brain development (Kesek, Zelazo, & Lewis, in press). Teenagers are thought to have greater potential to acquire metacognitive strategies for regulation of negative emotions and enhancement of positive emotions. Thus, for example, they may become better able to adapt their expression of emotions to influence others, to negotiate personal relationships in the presence of strong emotions, and deploy more diverse and flexible coping responses (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Fischer et al., 1989; Saarni, 1999).

These ideas are heuristically powerful, but the evidence behind them is limited. Although it is postulated that teens' emotional development involves increased conscious understanding and acquisition of "verbal-declarative" skills (Zeidner et al., 2003, p. 88), we have limited knowledge about what adolescents actually learn and how they learn it. To do this, we think it is helpful, if not essential, to focus on their emotional experiences in particular interactional settings.

Emotional Development in Context

The importance of settings to emotional development is richly demonstrated by our knowledge of child-parent relationships as an arena in which young children's emotional dispositions are shaped. Research largely bears out the thesis of object relations theory and attachment theory that children's experiences of emotion and its regulation (or dysregulation) in child-caregiver interactions affect their subsequent emotional dispositions and management skills. Children's interactions with their caregivers provide a matrix of affective experiences that shape their early emotional development, particularly in the context of close relationships (Cassidy, 1994; Magai, 1999; Zeidner et al., 2003).

As children grow older the amount of time spent with family declines, and other settings become increasingly salient and are potential sites for emotional development. These settings may provide opportunities for new types of emotional learning that anticipate the demands of adult settings and build on adolescents' emerging potentials for systems thinking and conscious self-regulation.

Organized youth programs, we theorize, are important settings for understanding emotional development, first, because they are typically contexts of instrumental goal-directed activity and thus may help prepare adolescents for the emotional dynamics of adult work settings. Heath (1998) and McLaughlin (2000) found that teens in high-quality youth programs engage in an “arc of work” that culminates in a final product or event that is subject to authentic evaluation. Such instrumental activities can be expected to elicit emotions associated with the attainment and non-attainment of long-term goals (e.g., excitement, frustration, anger; Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 2000) and thus provide youth with opportunities to learn about the causes and outcomes of these types of emotional episodes. Research in adult work settings suggests that positive and negative emotions can have facilitative or disruptive effects on work (Grawitch & Munz, 2005). We speculate that the goal-directed activities of youth programs may provide opportunities for young people to learn about these emotional processes in a work context. Indeed, achieving goals in this setting may demand that youth learn to understand and manage these processes.

A second important feature of youth programs is that this work is often done in collaborations with peers, which creates demands for youth to understand emotional dynamics in groups. Learning to navigate emotions in peer relationships is a challenging adolescent task in its own right (Furman, McDunn, & Young, in press; Larson & Asmussen, 1991). Working collaboratively toward a goal adds another level of demand for emotional knowledge and skills, again with pertinence to preparation for adult employment. Research shows that many adults lack adequate skills for managing emotions in work groups at their jobs, and that dysfunctional emotional dynamics occur frequently, with negative effects on work satisfaction and productivity (Glisson & James, 2002). Liu and Perrewé (2005) describe how negative emotions in work settings often lead to a disruptive emotional chain of unfolding behavior and affect. Youth programs may provide a collaborative context in which youth learn about managing the dynamics of emotions at the levels of self, other, and group.

A third rationale for focusing on youth programs is that they give us the opportunity to observe the roles of intentional organizational settings and experienced adults in supporting adolescents’ emotional development. Youth programs provide not only a structure of instrumental activity—the arc of work—but also an organizational culture that influences youth’s emotional experiences and growth. Organizational cul-

tures include both shared ways of doing things (norms, practices, strategies) and ways of thinking and feeling (beliefs, meanings, values; Glisson & James, 2002; Maton & Salem, 1995). These cultures can be expected to influence the frequency and types of emotions experienced in the setting and include implicit and explicit ideas about how members respond to emotions in self and others (Boyle, 2005; Grawitch & Munz, 2005; Hochschild, 1983). In youth programs, the adult leaders help shape the program culture in ways that may influence adolescents’ emotional development. Leaders may also influence youth development through modeling, coaching, and providing support (Rhodes, 2004).

The theater program we examined provided the opportunity to study adolescents’ emotional experience as they prepared a production, working collaboratively and with guidance from two experienced and emotionally attuned adults. It should be noted that the expressive nature of drama may provide youth added opportunities for perspective taking and emotional development (Best, 1978; Wright, 2006). In carrying out this investigation, we employed a social-ecological framework that conceptualizes development as occurring through the interaction between person and context over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Cole, Bremme, & Blanton, 2006; Rogoff, Baker-Sennet, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995). What follows is a theory-generating analysis aimed at developing preliminary propositions regarding processes of adolescents’ emotional development in relationship to the ongoing demands, culture, and experiences of this setting.

Following the Preparation of a Musical

How Data Were Collected

We studied a high school theater program over the 3 spring months that its members prepared the musical *Les Misérables* (the names of the youth, adults, and several unimportant details have been changed to preserve anonymity). The high school drew students from a small Midwestern city (population 6,000) and surrounding farms and towns. The cast and crew of *Les Misérables* included 110 of the school’s 840 students. The large number of students resulted in part from double-casting, in which two students held each major part and played the role on alternating nights of the performances.

The director, Ann, was a music teacher in town and had been directing the spring musical for 8 years. She chose the musical, developed her vision for its production, and was the only adult present at most

rehearsals. The head of the school's theater program, Ruth, directed other plays during the year and took the role of producer for the spring musical. Ruth coordinated relations with the school and oversaw set construction, publicity, the tech crew, and numerous other functions, many of which involved interactions with students. Although the adults ran the production, they cultivated student initiative and involvement. For example, the two students holding each role were encouraged to work together as they developed their parts, and the groups of students involved in each scene often worked independently (in classrooms and hallways) as the director rehearsed other scenes on stage.

Because our focus was on conscious developmental processes, we drew foremost on youth's ongoing accounts of their experiences over the 3 months. After the cast had been chosen, we asked Ann and Ruth to select a sample of 10 actors who were representative of the cast in terms of gender, prior experience, and type of role. The 5 girls and 5 boys they selected all agreed to participate. They had an average age of 16.0 (range = 14–17) and included 2 to 3 students from all four grades. All of these youth were non-Hispanic European American, reflecting the ethnic homogeneity of the school and community.

These youth were interviewed every 2 weeks over the production period. Interviews ($N = 73$) were conducted in person at the beginning, middle, and end of this period, and by phone during the intervening periods. An additional follow-up interview was conducted by phone with 9 of the youth 2 years after the production.

We also obtained data from interviews with the two adult leaders and the youth's parents, and from participant observations. Interviews with Ann and Ruth were done over the production period, following the same schedule as that with the youth ($N = 17$). Members of our staff conducted observations of the rehearsals on a weekly basis ($N = 14$). Ten parents were also interviewed by phone 2 years after the production (although we made limited use of those data). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The two staff members who conducted the observations took extensive written notes, following standard procedures of participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989).

In the interviews with youth and leaders the primary focus was getting their open-ended accounts of ongoing events and experiences in the production. Youth were also asked in each interview to describe anything they were learning, and in the middle and final interviews they were asked specifically to describe positive and negative emotional experiences

and what they had learned about emotions. In the 2-year follow-up interviews youth were again asked to describe what they had learned about emotions from their participation in theater, how they had learned it, and what role the setting, their peers, and the adult leaders played in this learning. It should be noted that because many of the youth had been in multiple productions over their high school years, their reports sometimes drew on their experiences in other productions. As with the youth interviews, those with the adult leaders focused on obtaining ongoing open-ended accounts of the production. The initial, middle, and final leader interviews also included questions about their efforts to facilitate emotional development in the youth.

Procedures of Qualitative Analyses

Analyses of the data drew on procedures of grounded theory and related techniques for qualitative analyses aimed at identifying themes, patterns, structure, and processes from narrative data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analyses involved cycles of close examination of the interview and observational transcripts alternating with formulation of concepts based on theoretical comparison and interpretation of the data. Although our objective was to ground the analyses in the participants' language and experiences, the formulation of concepts was partly informed by our ongoing reading of the literature on emotions (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Reconnaissance. The first step of analysis involved getting a "lay of the land." We identified all passages in the youth interviews that referred to emotions and coded them into preliminary categories that represented consistent patterns (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). These categories identified the different types of emotions youth reported experiencing (e.g., disappointment, elation, frustration) and their descriptions of what they learned. We also read the transcripts of the leader interviews, parent interviews, and observations; marked salient passages; and identified preliminary themes from these. These preliminary categories and themes, identified bottom up from the data, entered into the more top-down analysis and sorting of data in the next two steps.

Separating setting and developmental processes. The dual aims of our investigation, as described previously, were to understand the theater program as an experiential setting and the processes of emotional development facilitated in the setting. In the second step of analyses we separated data from the

interviews and observations that addressed each of these two topics. Thus, we decided, for example, that the expectations that Ann communicated to youth in the preaudition meeting and the leaders' consistent patterns of action throughout the rehearsals should be analyzed as part of the setting. Guidelines for conceptual ordering of qualitative data were followed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Conceptualizing layers in the setting. Interrelated with this second step, our data analyses and literature review suggested that the experiential setting could be meaningfully conceptualized in terms of three socioecological levels or layers. First, it was apparent from the youth and parent data that the theater program was embedded in a larger *community surround*, including the school and the youth's families. (The setting, of course, was also embedded in a larger cultural and national macrosystem; however, little data directly addressed that relationship, and we chose not to engage in an interpretive analysis of this important higher order layer.) Second, the data suggested that the theater program had an internal *program culture* that was cultivated by the leaders and shared by the youth. Third, we were influenced by Barker (1968) to view the youth's repeated *emotional experiences* as components of the setting. At the conclusion of this step we then identified data pertinent to each of these three layers.

Within category analyses. At the next step, we coded and analyzed the data within each of these three layers of the setting (community surround, program culture, emotional experiences) and within the category of developmental processes. Because procedures for these analyses were adapted to the differing nature of the data in each of these categories, we describe the procedures at the beginning of the following sections where each category is discussed.

Integration. The final step involved theoretical analyses of the relationships and linkages within and across categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We asked, for example, how the community surround and the program culture might have influenced the youth's emotional experiences and how properties of the setting contributed to youth's development. The results of these analyses are presented in the conclusions of each section and as propositions in the Conclusion section of the article. It should be noted that our steps involved a progression from empirical analyses to theoretical postulation, and hence our conclusions should be understood, not as research findings but as empirically grounded hypotheses.

The Experiential Setting of *Les Misérables*

The Community Surround

The data suggested that youth's experiences in the theater program were shaped in part by the community at large, including the school and the families of the drama students. This surround was not a major focus of the original study; therefore, data were limited and our examination of this layer of the setting was informal and descriptive.

Theater productions at the high school were major events in this small city. The theater program was known for the high quality of its productions and they were events around which the community rallied. Two parents told us they had chosen to live in the school district because of the theater program, and several had brought their children to the productions annually from a young age. Performances were always sold out and were attended by members of the community at large as well as extended family members of the performers, some of whom traveled from out of state to attend.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that a setting provides more optimal conditions for development when there is positive interaction and "goal consensus" between that setting and other settings in a youth's life (p. 212). That was apparent here. In the interviews parents expressed strong support for the emphasis they saw Ann and Ruth placing on equal opportunity, camaraderie, and personal growth. Parents also supported the production with their labor. Ann estimated that 75% of parents helped in some way, for example, by providing food at rehearsals, sewing costumes, or selling tickets. Although Ann and Ruth reported a couple of occasions when parents were intrusive or disruptive, they were rare.

In addition to appreciating this collective support, youth experienced the performances as occasions for them to give something to the community. From the beginning of the work, they voiced a sense of responsibility to create a good performance for the audience. For example, in his first interview, Sean anticipated the performances:

These people have come from a hard day's work. They're here for a reason: to watch you perform, to watch you act. And in doing that you should bring them happiness; you should make them laugh; you should make them enjoy their night.

The Program Culture

Though the theater program was embedded in this larger community, the students also experienced the

Les Misérables set as a separate realm, with its own ways of doing things. Cody described coming to theater each day as entering “a whole ‘nother world.” We found that it had its own internal culture, with distinctive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, and included “cultural tools” (cf. Rogoff, 2003, p. 278) for handling the emotional experiences in the setting. This culture appeared to be cultivated by Ann and Ruth, adapted by the youth, and handed down from show to show. Our analyses involved identifying all data from the leaders, youth, and observations that were indicative of the program culture, then systematically coding these data to identify recurring themes (cf. Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). These analyses identified three central features of the culture pertinent to the youth’s emotional experiences.

First, members of the production expressed commitment to the work of creating a high-quality performance. From the outset, Ann and Ruth set high standards. At the preaudition meeting, they articulated expectations for attendance, applying effort, and learning lines. Students reported similar high expectations for themselves. Ashley said, “That’s why I think people at [name of school] do musicals, because they knew that whatever we do would be a quality product.” Ruth explained, “There is a tradition: We do good stuff.”

It was a culture in which this work and effort was not just expected it was celebrated. During rehearsals we observed Ann frequently respond to students’ performances with exuberance. Sara said that Ann “was always praising us if we have done something right, and if we get something like perfect, she will be out there clapping and screaming and just being so excited for us getting it.” When a scene went well, we observed that students watching also cheered enthusiastically. Marina said, “It’s good to be excited and to tell people that they’re doing a good job, because then they’re gonna work even harder.” Youth shared excitement and pride in doing good work.

Second, at the same time that this internal culture promoted high expectations, it also recognized and accepted that members would experience strong emotions as part of the process. Ann talked openly about emotions the group experienced in working on the production. She also modeled expression of her own emotions. Asked in the follow-up interview what made theater a good context for learning about emotions, Drew said:

Ann was a very emotional person herself and wasn’t afraid to talk to us. She would sit up front and tell us how she was feeling, on several

occasions would cry in front of everyone. And it would just make you know that it was alright to feel frustrated or feel however you felt; it was perfectly fine and that you shouldn’t feel bad about it.

From our observations, it appeared that Ann was intentional about the emotions she expressed, displaying many more positive than negative emotions, rarely if ever expressing anger, and never “dumping” emotions on cast members. She modeled emotions that enhanced constructive collaboration.

Youth reported that they were emotionally open with each other as well. In Cody’s words: “It’s such a family-type group that you can just open up your heart to anyone, even if you don’t know them that well, and that you should let them do the same for you.”

The third salient feature of the culture was that it provided emotional support. At the preaudition meeting, Ann emphasized that every member of the cast and crew mattered and that they needed to be respectful and supportive of each other: “Whether you punch tickets or have a lead role, I consider you to be equally important.” At this meeting Ann also acknowledged that there would be difficult times and provided a guarantee of her support: “There are ups and downs. We’re all going to work together, with one heart, one heart beat. If you have questions, you call me.” During the rehearsals we observed youth repeatedly receiving support for their work from Ann. As Ashley described, “When we are practicing and you get something wrong, she’ll do it until you get it right. It’s always good having a director who is like that, who will work until you get it right, so you know you’re doing a good job.” Students also reported going to Ann and Ruth when they needed advice and support on personal issues.

Ann and Ruth cultivated this ethos of care and concern among the students. They created nurturing activities, including having meals brought to rehearsals, group back rubs, and relaxation exercises, that acknowledged youth’s feelings and provided contexts for collective emotional support. The students, in turn, described providing support to each other. Ashley said, “I keep on thinking of younger classmen to help bring them along.” Later she summarized the ethos of mutual support: “It’s this thing that you get along with people. You are in the performance together; you have to work with one another.”

This culture of high expectations, openness to emotions, and support resembles the features of families that facilitate positive emotional development in young children (Denham, Caal, Bassett,

Benga & Geangu, 2004; Zeidner et al., 2003). Yet there were important differences. It was a very large “family,” whose energies were focused on a difficult and prolonged instrumental task. It was also a group in which only one adult, Ann, was present at most rehearsals; thus, youth needed to be active partners in cultivating the culture day by day. The ethos of *Les Misérables* is as readily compared to the organizational cultures found in creative and productive adult work groups: being mission driven and relationship centered, and having positive norms for affect management (Glisson & James, 2002; Grawitch & Munz, 2005). It was a culture in which members described being proactive in encouraging positive emotions and dealing constructively with negative emotions.

Emotional Experiences

The third and most immediate layer of the setting was the emotional experiences of the youth. Barker (1968) found that settings were associated with “standing patterns of behavior”: repeated actions and behaviors performed in response to the demands, roles, and goals of the setting. Settings are also characterized by repeated patterns of emotions, elicited by the distinct activities and events of that occur in that context (Larson & Verma, 1999; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

The preliminary coding of the youth’s interviews identified several types of emotions that occurred frequently in *Les Misérables*. Our reading of the emotion literature (e.g., Frijda, 1996; Izard, 2002; Saarni, 1999) suggested the importance of understanding these emotions in terms of episodes unfolding in context over time. We therefore examined each report of an emotion in terms of the sequence of eliciting situation, appraisals and responses to the emotion by self and others, and outcomes. In some cases more than one person provided convergent information on the same episode. Although our data did not provide complete or convergent information for each reported emotion, they suggested that each type of emotion was associated with a fairly regular sequence of unfolding experiences.

Disappointment with casting. Immediately after the casting was announced we obtained several reports of youth’s unhappiness with the roles they or friends had received. Ruth said one disappointed student, who had her heart set on an acting career, was so distraught that it took a counselor and social worker an hour to stop her crying and calm her down. Barnett (2006) found this type of distress scenario to be long and profound among youth who were turned down after cheerleading tryouts. But students in *Les*

Misérables reported that their disappointment typically dissipated within 1 or 2 weeks, as youth talked it through with their friends and got engaged in the roles they were given.

Satisfaction and elation from doing well. As the work of developing the production began, students reported frequent experiences of excitement, satisfaction, elation, and “adrenaline rush” as they began mastering their roles. Cody described experiences of satisfaction from “learning the dances and nailing the dances, that’s a really, really fun time. And just overall watching the show come together is kind of like a gradual: ‘This is good, but this is better, but this is better.’” This type of positive emotion was also noted repeatedly in our observations and occurred throughout the rehearsals.

These experiences of satisfaction and elation in doing well were often shared. As Dawn reported, “When people do really amazing things on stage it gets you really excited for the production. You just can’t wait for everyone to see it.” The day after a rehearsal in which the chorus did particularly well, Marina described a contagion of positive feelings:

Just seeing everything start to fit in, it just clicks, and you can feel the energy on the stage. Energy is very contagious when you’re on stage so, like if I sing loud and I get excited about it, it usually just kind of spreads and other people catch on. . . . It’s hard not to want to work for that when you see it happen.

We observed that Ann’s good humor was a frequent catalyst for these contagious positive feelings. Several youth, including Ashley, described this: “The director’s really excited, and if the director’s really excited then it flows out to everyone else.”

Youth also reported individual experiences of elation from doing well. Ryan described how hard it was to get his lines right, and thus the positive feelings he had when he succeeded: “When I get something correct, like get it perfectly, that’s always cool.” Jack, who was cast as Javert, recounted this experience at a rehearsal when he first felt he had mastered a scene:

I’ve just come out and Valjean comes down, we have our little scene and then the music starts and I’m just STRONG—men tremble. I’m just trying to do the best I can and as I’m walking off, everybody was just really quiet for a second and they’re all like, “Wow,” and everybody around me was either like backing away from me or just telling me, “Man, that was such a good job.” That was probably the best feeling I had had in a play, just feeling that I could do it, be so good.

Positive emotions occur when people make progress toward desired goals (Frijda, 1996), and this appeared to happen again and again in the preparation of *Les Misérables*. It was a culture that provided encouragement and support for doing well, and this appeared to foster a frequent emotional sequence in which satisfaction or elation were expressed and often spread through the group.

Anger and stress with interpersonal obstacles. As time progressed and demands mounted, feelings of anger and interpersonal stress were reported frequently. Nearly all the students described occasions of frustration with peers who were egotistical or obstructing the work. Ashley had to work closely with Sara and reported that she was “really bossy and mean lots of times. She’s always like, ‘Do this, do that’ and it just drives me insane.” Drew reported frustration with actors who were not prepared: “Working on stage with people that don’t know their stuff, you just wanna punch ‘em (laughs),” although he went on to recite what sounded like a mantra: “You know, close your eyes, take a breath, and it’ll come out in the end.”

Early on, an ongoing source of anger and stress was an adult brought in to teach dialect. He was rarely prepared, acted abruptly toward youth, and directed all his attention to actors in lead roles, which upset cast members because it violated their ethos that “every student mattered.” Marina described going home enraged one night after being put down and keeping her parents up late talking. Dawn, who was a stage manager, was trying to maintain the cast’s morale, but it was difficult: “The dialect coach is a big challenge, like I just want to go up there and give him a piece of mind.” Ann observed these negative feelings and worried that the values she had cultivated were “being torn down.” She described how an angry youth came up to her and said, “Don’t tell me my part’s important anymore because it’s really obvious it’s not.” Because Ann had hired the coach, she felt obligated to give him a chance, but she also spent added time being attentive to youth and doing “damage control.” After things did not improve, she fired the coach, which produced collective feelings of relief.

Just as positive emotions were contagious, so were negative emotions. Cody reported, “When people got angry, other people got angry.” As they approached the final weeks, youth said the time pressure and interpersonal stress increased. They described becoming more excited, but also experiencing more negative feelings. Drew, a veteran of prior productions anticipated it several weeks before: “It’s gonna start to get to the point where we’ll be having larger

rehearsals, more people, more frustration, and you feel like you don’t get anything done.” Similarly Dawn said, “People get so tired and they are real testy and they are going to let you know about it.” Later she reported that “everyone is just kind of psycho.”

Both the adults and youth, however, worked to limit interpersonal stress and contain its negative consequences. Ruth said that antagonism often occurred when the technical crew (lights, sound, etc.) joined the set in the final weeks: “Throw together tired actors and tired tech people and you can get some real tension going.” To minimize this, Marina recounted that Ruth “sat us all down and talked to us and told us that it was gonna be hard when they came. They’re really good about doing things like that, about explaining things to us beforehand to prevent things, instead of just trying to keep us calm when it happened.” In this and other ways the adults enlisted the youth to be partners to prevent negative emotions from propagating.

In sum, episodes of interpersonal anger and stress tended to follow a typical experiential sequence. Just as positive emotions are elicited by progress toward desired goals, anger and frustration are related to obstruction of goals (Frijda, 1996). In a large undertaking like this, it was not surprising that youth had repeated experiences of anger and frustration, most often in response to interpersonal conflict. In many organizational settings these kinds of emotions can run out of control (Liu & Perrewé, 2005), but we were aware of only a few instances where anger unfolded in a sustained chain of effects for multiple youth. Through the youth’s and the leaders’ efforts, these emotions typically dissipated or were held in check.

Anxiety and stage fright. Anxiety mounted as the performances approached and was reported most often in the hours before students went on stage. Jack described it as a very personal experience, the feeling that “it’s all me now; I can’t rely on any of the other singers to back me up.” Drew worried that it was “gonna be like my freshman year when I go out there and I’m gonna go, ‘What’s my first note?’ (laughs), and I’m gonna freak the first night.” After the performance, Nathan reported, “One person in particular just could barely stand up straight . . . during the show, she just almost had a breakdown.” But youth also described helping talk each other through this kind of anxiety. As with anger and stress, the supportive culture appeared to help youth address and minimize stage fright.

The long-term arc of emotions. The emotional climax of the youth’s work was the elation they felt when

they successfully performed *Les Misérables* and did well. In the interviews following the performance, several youth reported sadness that it was over. Ashley recounted the scene backstage after the final production: "Lots of seniors were crying. Lots of guys were crying too." But the youth also described exhilaration. Sean said, "You feel like you could take on the world. You feel like you just conquered this huge behemoth of a play . . . and then you could go out and do it again." The moment of truth, the "authentic evaluation," had arrived and students reported being thrilled and exhilarated by adulation from the audience and the success of their 3 months of effort.

This positive emotion and success gave added significance to the experiences youth had been through over the arc of their work. Cody said:

I can see how everything starts out so crummy and how even with the problems we have, we have different dialect coaches coming in, we have people who are threatened to be kicked out. [But] you can pull through all that and get everything together.

Veteran youth came to see how many of the emotions in their collective work occurred in predictable ways over the sequence of effort from auditions to the performances. They saw that the ups and downs they went through were part of a process that led to achieving their goal.

A Matrix of Emotional Experiences

What we found, then, was that this theater setting provided youth with a distinct set or matrix of emotional experiences across their arc of work. It included, for example, experiences of disappointment at not getting a desired part, elation at making progress, frustration at lack of progress, and anxiety from going on stage. Each type of emotional experience tended to unfold in fairly predictable ways, as a product of the tasks and demands of creating a musical production, and as a product of a program culture that cultivated certain ways of thinking and acting, certain tools for responding to emotional situations. Positive emotions were encouraged and often spread through the group. Negative emotions were discussed openly and often elicited supportive responses that helped dispel them. Though anger could be contagious, it was typically addressed before it led to the kind of chain of negative affect and events that have been described in dysfunctional work settings. Youth came to see that these different types

of emotional episodes were a predictable part of the work of creating a successful production.

What Youth Learned and How

How might this repeated, predictable set of emotional experiences provide opportunities for young people's emotional development? Our final set of analyses focused on youth's descriptions of their emotional learning, including both the "what" and the "how." We first coded the descriptions of what they learned into categories and subcategories (Auerbach & Silberstein, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Most of these data came in response to questions asking youth what they had learned. Three overarching categories emerged from this coding: (a) gaining abstract emotional knowledge, (b) learning to manage negative emotions, and (c) learning to manage positive emotions. Each is summarized in its own section in the following discussion. Our analyses of how youth learned and how the setting supported this learning was integrated within this analysis. In some cases youth described the learning process as they reported what they learned, and we have integrated some of these data into our account of each category of learning. But youth also provided more general descriptions of their process of emotional learning, particularly in the follow-up interviews. Therefore, we devote a fourth section to our analyses of what the youth's reports as a whole suggested about how the developmental process occurred.

Emotional Knowledge

Youth reported gaining abstract knowledge about emotions that fit into two salient subcategories: (a) emotions and personalities and (b) causes and outcomes of emotions.

Emotions and personalities. First, youth described gaining understanding of the relationships between immediate emotions and individuals' differing personalities. At a basic level, they reported discovering that individuals varied greatly in their experience and expression of emotions. Having watched other cast members over 3 months, Sean reported learning that "everyone is different and that's one of the ways they show it, through their emotions." Drew learned that there were some youth who are volatile and more emotional than others. He also described coming to recognize that differences in emotionality may be authentic or a matter of display. This knowledge included increased awareness of their own emotional patterns. Several youth reported determining that

they were more emotional or subdued than others. Sean said he learned:

I'm not the emotional sort, not really, I can be, but I saw a lot of other people who were very teary at times. I feel kind of guilty at times when I don't show as much emotion but, it's just something I don't do.

Marina described her learning in comparison to a theater friend: "She's very outgoing and she's always dramatic and I don't necessarily think that's me." Marina also recognized she is a somewhat different person in theater than elsewhere: "In real life, I'm not like overly dramatic and excited about everything." They were learning that people differ in emotional patterns and these may differ across contexts.

Furthermore, youth reported gaining knowledge of the underlying dispositions that can account for these differences. Sara noticed that "some take criticism better than others." Drew learned that "there's a few people who take things way too hard," whom you learn "to be careful around." Dawn came to recognize the influence of past experiences on emotional dispositions. She said she had her "eyes opened" to the wide range of experiences people have gone through and how these shaped their emotions: "Their experiences are very different from mine, . . . [others had] a lot of experiences that I had never even imagined in my wildest dreams and that played largely in their emotions." The data suggested youth were developing knowledge of personality processes that influenced the occurrence of emotions.

As suggested by these examples, youth attributed this knowledge to their own observations and insights. The many emotional experiences they witnessed in others and themselves over the 3 months provided a rich set of exemplars for them to compare, analyze, and draw conclusions. Several youth also reported learning through the imaginative process of creating their characters. Sean described gaining knowledge about emotion and personality through exploring his character who was "essentially a thief and a liar and robber, but also has deep down a heart to care for people." Dawn described a back-and-forth comparison process:

Theater allows you to step into someone else's shoes and have someone else's emotions. So, it gives you a different perspective on your own emotions because you go from reality to something that's not real and then you have to step back into your own real world.

Therefore, in addition to observing emotions in peers and themselves, their theatrical characters provided youth further exemplars of emotion and personality to contrast and compare.

Causes and outcomes of emotions. Closely related to this learning, youth reported gaining knowledge of the contingencies that shaped the unfolding of emotional sequences. They recounted learning about factors that influenced the occurrence of emotions, as when Jack described learning how his physical state affected his disposition to anger:

One thing drama has definitely taught me is that when you're tired, you are more emotional. Especially for me. If I've had a long day or the rehearsal has gone on a little bit too long, you really realize that you're a lot angrier, you're a lot [more] short-tempered, or a lot more emotional in pretty much every way than you normally would be.

Other youth reported learning that stress, criticism, doing well, and the emotions in their characters influenced their own and others' emotions.

The youth also described learning about the effects of emotions on themselves and others. As students experienced elation and stress during rehearsals, Ashley, for example, reported learning that the exhilaration of doing well "wipes away all the other fear and doubt," and Ryan learned to "make sure that you don't get frustrated, 'cause I mean if you get frustrated you block a lot of things out, a lot of ideas and stuff." These statements reflect the findings of basic research that emotions influence a person's attention and thought processes. Youth also described becoming sensitive to how emotions influenced the group. Jack reported learning that when the group was happy and excited their work went "a lot smoother." Conversely, he noted, "If you have people with strong negative emotions, it just kind of brings the whole show down."

These descriptions suggested that students were learning about the contingencies that influenced when emotions occurred and how they affected people. They were identifying if-then relationships that shaped the unfolding sequence of emotion in individuals and groups. They learned, for example, that if positive or negative emotions were expressed, then they had an impact on the group's work. We must be clear that none of the youth described a complex model of how different biological, psychological, and social systems interacted to influence the occurrence of emotions. Nonetheless, their reports suggested they were gaining insights on the causal role of factors from these different systems.

As we shift to discussing the youth's learning about emotional management, it is worth noting that this was an extension of their knowledge about causes and outcomes. What youth learned about emotional management involved strategies through which they could intentionally influence the unfolding sequences of positive and negative emotions.

Managing Anger and Interpersonal Stress

Students described learning to influence all the types of negative emotional sequences we identified previously. They reported developing strategies for dealing with the disappointment of not getting a desired role, managing anxiety, and reducing the stress created by the demands the production put on their time. The most frequent theme, however, was learning to manage the interpersonal stress they experienced during the production. Their anger, particularly toward peers, created a challenge but also appeared to be a stimulus for learning.

Not inducing anger in others. First, students described learning not to contribute to the propagation of negative emotions. They recognized that their own negative emotions could be contagious, and they learned to avoid interacting with people in ways that would transmit this emotion. At the mid-interview, Jack described a recent experience in which others' lack of preparation upset him:

[Last Friday] it was pretty much 45 minutes straight of us doing the same 16 bars of music over and over and over. . . . I can see myself really complaining about it, . . . but I think I've come to realize that if you do that you are just going to bring the show down.

Though Jack felt strong frustration with his peers, he had learned that expressing it would have a harmful effect, and he made a conscious decision to keep it to himself.

As stage manager, Dawn had many similar frustrating experiences with fellow students. But she said that Ann helped her learn to restrain her anger: "[She] has been really helpful to me, kind of teaching me as I go. I have a tendency to lose my temper easily . . . she kind of helped me realize, people can't see things the way we can see them now." In a later interview, Dawn said Ann helped her learn how cast members' outside lives affected what happens on the set and how to adapt to them.

Two years later, when we interviewed the students, several reported that learning to restrain their

negative reactions to others was one of the most important lessons they learned from their theater experiences. Ashley recalled the anger and frustration she had felt toward peers and described learning:

You can't always say the first thing that comes to your brain; you have to let it go, talk to them, and if there's anything else you can do, maybe talk to the director. You don't attack them. That never works.

Similarly, Ryan said the experience "really helped me in controlling my frustration and not blowing up on somebody. And I've also learned to be more respectful of what people are going through and being able to accept their feelings." Youth's reports reflected knowledge about the adverse effect that anger can have on an interpersonal system and the importance of holding it back.

Managing one's own negative emotions. To keep anger in check, youth described learning strategies to manage it. Ryan reported learning to "chill out" and "calm [himself] down." Marina said, "I've learned it's helpful to cool down a little bit [when angry], but then I usually do need to find someone to talk to me about it, so that I don't just keep getting more mad." Drew reported learning to "not let your emotions bottle up inside and really get to you," and he described how discussing problems with friends gave him "insight" into managing his emotion.

Youth also learned to preempt factors that influenced or increased anger. When Jack observed how tiredness made him more emotional, he said:

You kind of have to learn to recognize that and go "okay, I've had a long day and I need to be gentler than usual" because I know I'm going to have a short fuse and it's going to be hard for me to deal with some things.

Drew described "learning to communicate with people and to tell them up front how I feel about something instead of just letting it sit back and, you know, until I get more angry about it." Sean reported learning the value of "appraising" yourself when interacting with difficult people to monitor what you are feeling.

The strategies youth learned, it is notable, drew on ideas and tools from the program culture. They came to recognize that negative emotions needed to be contained, and they internalized strategies that Ann, Ruth, and peers provided.

Managing Elation and Positive Emotion

Theorists have argued that management of positive emotions involves not “regulating” them but rather “upregulation” (Kuhl, 2000). Research shows that positive affect can increase individuals’ creativity and facilitate group work by enhancing motivation, releasing inhibitions, and increasing cognitive flexibility, problem solving, and other dimensions of creative thinking (Grawitch & Munz, 2005; Isen, 2000; Kuhl, 2000). Consistent with this, youth’s learning about management of positive emotions included using them for these benefits.

The most common theme in youth’s reports dealt with learning to use positive emotion to enhance their work. Cody described learning how the “triumph” she experienced in mastering a dance was

a big source of motivation. I carry [it] over to the scenes I’m not quite so comfortable with. Like I got this dance I don’t have to worry about it, so I’m just going to shift all that effort into this scene and make it work.

Sara described learning to use comedy to lighten the mood of the group and smooth through tense situations. Other youth reported doing things to raise the spirits of the cast, and that getting people excited about what they are doing makes them work harder. As with interpersonal anger, the youth were absorbing messages from the program culture about how to manage positive emotions.

At the same time youth were learning to use positive emotion, they also described learning to control their expression of it. In *Les Misérables*, successful work was celebrated and display of positive emotions toward others’ work was encouraged; however, expression of positive feelings about one’s own work could get one labeled as “a diva” or egotistical. Jack reported this tension after he had performed well at one rehearsal:

I am always so happy when I do well that I just wanna express it somehow, but that usually comes out in people as bragging, so I try not to do it so much. I hope my head didn’t get too big afterwards because everyone was so nice after I had finished, they said I did really well and I just don’t wanna be arrogant.

Jack had received praise for the power he communicated as Javert, but he had learned that coming across as too proud was not countenanced by the program culture. Therefore, despite his elation at having performed well, he tried to limit his expression of it and

display humility. Similarly, Drew came to recognize that display of positive emotion could have a negative influence on others’ states. He reported learning that “you can get too proud of yourself, and that would obviously make other people feel bad about themselves.”

Therefore, youth were learning to use positive emotions to motivate their work, but they were also learning to follow cultural rules for the acceptable expression of these emotions. The data suggest youth were gaining strategies to maximize the benefits while limiting the negative effects of positive emotion, to navigate the sometimes conflicting demands of internal psychological and external social systems.

How Youth Learned: The Developmental Process

What the youth reported learning, then, was functional knowledge about the unfolding of emotional sequences. This included knowledge of how personality, stress, physical states, and specific situations influence emotions and how emotions, in turn, influence thought processes, motivations, and group social dynamics. It also included youth’s acquisition of management strategies for intervening in the unfolding of these emotional sequences in ways that were constructive for individuals, the group, and the group’s work. Their accounts suggested that the youth were beginning to understand that emotional episodes were shaped by fairly predictable systemic processes—that emotions were not out of their control; they could understand their causes and intervene to influence how they unfold.

Our analyses of the interview data suggested two salient themes in youth’s reports on how they acquired this functional knowledge: (a) youth as agents and (b) role of the leaders.

Youth as agents. We found first that the students almost always framed the learning process as one in which they were the agents of change. They repeatedly said “I learned that,” “I discovered that,” or “I saw that.” This included active processes of induction. They most often described learning through observing the unfolding of emotional episodes. They compared emotions in themselves, others, and their characters. They evaluated consequences and contingencies associated with different strategies for managing emotions. Youth also described learning in response to situational demands of the setting. They recounted seeing how one should not fuel negative emotional chains and not express exhilaration in ways that would alienate other youth. Several students used phrases such as “you had to learn . . .” or “you learn to deal with . . .,” which suggested that their

learning was an imperative adaptive response to the demands of the setting.

The youth often presented peers as collaborators in this active learning process. Learning was not achieved only through self-talk; the voices of others played a role. Asked how other cast members helped him learn about emotions, Jack said: "Oftentimes they'd be going through the same thing and you could talk about it." Marina said talking to friends helped her learn because "you may not really realize what it is that you're feeling until you can get it out." Youth's accounts suggested that this was often a reciprocal process in which they helped each other understand emotional episodes and talk through how to handle them.

An important point, we think, is that the material students drew on for this active developmental process involved real, "hot" emotional episodes. They learned from the affectively charged experiences that were frequent in the setting: from exhilaration, anger, anxiety, and disappointment and observing how these emotions unfolded under different contingencies. They learned from evaluating how different strategies for managing these emotions worked.

Role of the leaders. Though youth presented themselves as agents of their emotional learning, they also credited the adults with facilitating this process. Asked in the follow-up interview how the leaders had helped her learn about emotions, Marina, like several others, mentioned their openness: "Just letting us know that it was okay to be emotional." Marina further pointed to "the sensitivity that the directors had: just being willing to stop practice at times and just sit down and talk about how everyone is doing as far, as like keeping up with schoolwork and stuff outside of drama." Similarly, Sara mentioned their availability to talk about emotional issues: "They have helped most by, if there was something bothering us musical-related or even not, they have always made themselves available to talk."

Students also pointed to the adults' coaching and modeling. Ryan said that Ann had helped him learn to deal with his frustration by "channeling it through my singing and acting." Ashley said that Ann "always showed and taught us how important it is to have that exhilaration." Youth also reported learning about emotions from Ann's openness in expressing her own emotions and the adults' example of how to think and act in conflictual and emotion-laden situations. We suspect that adults rarely communicate with adolescents on this kind of open and equal basis, and that youth's many reports of emotional learning stemmed from the adults creating conditions in which strong feelings were acknowledged, expressed, and made part of the daily vernacular.

The adults reported believing that youth learned from experiencing emotions. When describing events that created negative emotions, Ann periodically said, "They'll learn from that," and in her final interview she said:

It is very rewarding because you see them grow from, like, being irritated: "Well I didn't get the part I wanted [or] my friend didn't make it and I did," or that kind of thing, and they have to work through all that, and you see how they grow as people, and it's amazing how much growth can happen in three months, not just, you know, on stage.

The leaders did not try to "teach" youth about emotions in the abstract. Rather they helped create conditions in which youth learned from the set of emotions that occurred in their work. They cultivated a culture that provided tools—ways of thinking, feeling, and acting—that youth drew on to learn from these emotional experiences. They helped shape a predictable environment, a matrix of experiences, in which youth could see that positive emotions were helpful and negative emotions can be dealt with in constructive ways.

Conclusion: Grounded Theory on Adolescent Emotional Development

Emotional development in adolescence, we have contended, needs to be understood in situ: as occurring in response to the daily demands and affordances of specific experiential settings. Just as child–parent interactions have provided a fruitful venue for understanding the emotional development of young children, we believe that contexts such as organized youth programs provide valuable microcosms for understanding adolescents' emotional development, particularly in relation to the type of collaborative work and group-level dynamics that are relevant to their adult lives. Our analyses suggested that this one program setting, a theater production, provided some of the features associated with positive affective development in families: emotional predictability, openness to emotion, and adults playing a role in restoring emotional homeostasis when it was needed. But we also found features unique to this setting that facilitated the more systems-oriented and conscious learning thought to be distinctive to adolescence. We summarize the conclusions of our analysis by offering three propositions about the person–environment transactions involved in adolescent emotional development.

Proposition A. Adolescents are Agents in Their Emotional Development

Scholars contend that adolescents have new capabilities for executive control of emotion (Keating, 2004; Zeidner et al., 2003), and this study provides a picture of what those capabilities look like in situ, in one context. Youth in *Les Misérables* described exercising executive control at two levels. At the first level, they learned conscious strategies, strategies they described using in response to emotions in themselves, others, and the group. At the second, meta level, youth described themselves as agents in the process of acquiring these strategies. They compared emotions across people and situations, and they drew conclusions about how elation, anger, and other emotional sequences unfolded and how to manage them. We are not proposing that this process of conscious agentic learning accounts for all of adolescents' emotional development. Brain maturation and nonconscious learning may play important roles (Kesek et al., in press). Nor are we proposing that teenagers are able to achieve mastery of all emotional situations (who does?). What the analyses show is that, under beneficial conditions, adolescents can be capable producers of their own emotional development.

Proposition B. Youth's Active Process Occurs in Response to the Set of Hot Emotional Episodes in a Setting

This study indicates that these beneficial conditions include repeated experiences with predictable hot emotional episodes. Part of the challenge of emotional development, we think, is for adolescents to understand the strong influence that emotions can have on subjective experience, for example, in biasing perception, creating tunnel vision, and altering judgment. The developmental task for adolescents includes learning to distinguish these types of distortions, but at the same time youth are learning to recognize the positive functions that emotions can serve (Larson et al., 1999). Direct experiences with real emotional episodes, as happened in *Les Misérables*, may be valuable if not essential to learning to understand and manage emotions (see also Izard, 2002).

But our analyses suggested that it is not simply having these hot experiences that is important. It is having repeated opportunities to experience and observe them. *Les Misérables* appeared to be a beneficial context for emotional development because it provided a fairly safe and predictable matrix of repeated emotional episodes. The youth's frequent experiences of "the adrenaline rush" from doing well, and their observation of this experience in others,

appeared to provide conditions to learn both to use positive emotions for motivation and to contain expression of personal pride. Their experience of episodes of stress, anger, and frustration appeared to help youth learn about the contagion of negative emotions in groups and develop techniques for limiting their propagation. We think learning occurred because this setting provided recurring opportunities for youth to observe this set of emotional episodes and their contingencies, as well as to try out different strategies for managing them.

We propose that emotional development in other settings of teens' lives can be understood in terms of the types of regular emotional episodes that occur in them. Youth sports, for example, are associated with frequent experiences of stress from competition and enjoyment of mastery, each leading to distinct influences on motivation and performance (Scanlan, Babkes, & Scanlan, 2005). Teenagers' romantic relationships are associated with frequent episodes of intense positive and negative emotions, which can careen out of control, often with little opportunity for adult guidance (Larson et al., 1999). It is important to ask what constructive or unconstructive lessons about managing emotions youth draw from the distinctive types of emotional episodes associated with these and other settings.

Proposition C. Youth Develop Abilities to Understand and Manage Emotions in Part by Drawing on the Emotional Culture of the Setting

Research in organizational psychology suggests that organized settings can be characterized as having a measurable "emotion culture" (Boyle, 2005). They explicitly or implicitly sanction specific ways of thinking about and dealing with emotion (Grawitch & Munz, 2005). The emotion culture of *Les Misérables* appeared to be important to the youth's development, first, because it functioned to ensure that most episodes of strong emotions led to favorable or, at worst, benign outcomes. The ethos cultivated by the leaders, supported by parents, and shared by youth helped ensure that positive emotions were encouraged, anger was defused, and egotistical pride contained, thus creating an emotionally positive and safe environment, conditions Izard (2002) argues are important for favorable emotional learning.

Second, this culture appeared to facilitate the developmental process through the youth's internalization of the emotional tools it provided. Although the youth were active learners, their learning appeared to partly involve adopting ways of thinking, feeling, and acting from the program culture. Youth

often responded to the hot emotions they experienced in *Les Misérables* by appropriating the culture's tools: shared knowledge about how episodes of different types of emotions unfold and specific strategies for managing these. The adult leaders were central to this process. At the same time they promoted high standards for the youth's work, they modeled positive emotional management and coached the students in care, respect, and openness to emotions in themselves and each other.

A task for future research on adolescent development is to understand how youth draw on the emotion cultures present in different organized settings (schools, workplaces, faith-based institutions, diverse youth programs) as well as informal settings (peer groups, romantic relationships, interactive media, families) to deal with the emotions in those settings. What models, concepts, and tools are provided, and which do youth appropriate? Of course the media and the larger culture of which youth are a part also provide ways of thinking about and managing emotions (Denham et al., 2004). We argue that much can be learned by investigating the emotion cultures of the multiple daily settings of adolescents' lives and studying how youth use and internalize them.

The concepts and propositions suggested here need to be tested. Our discussion in this essay was driven by data obtained from a small sample of youth in one unique setting; these data do not "prove" anything. We do not intend to imply that this setting is prototypic of other settings; indeed, it was deliberately selected because it was expected to provide rich material. Further research is needed to evaluate the developmental processes described here across youth programs and other settings. Intensive microgenetic research (Siegler, 2006), combining observation with self-reports obtained from diaries or experience sampling (Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2007) could facilitate closer, more systematic examination of the conditions under which hot emotional episodes are a catalyst for emotional learning. Comparative and longitudinal research would be useful to evaluate the role of individual differences (including attachment histories, cultural backgrounds, and developmental levels) and diverse setting-level factors (settings' emotional patterns and culture, community context variables, adult leadership styles) in mediating and moderating young people's acquisition of emotional knowledge and management strategies.

Although there is much to be done, we think this investigation provides a useful demonstration of the importance of the setting as a unit of analysis for

emotional development, and it provides preliminary ideas about this development as an active process in which adolescents learn through conscious observation and management of emotional episodes within the context of affordances and tools provided by the setting.

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