Adolescents' Interpretations of the Role of Emotion in High School

Topics

by Christy Galletta Horner, Tanner LeBaron Wallace & Matthew J. Bundick — 2015

Background: *To persistently engage in academic tasks and efficiently process cognitively demanding material in school, successful learners must employ various self-regulatory systems—including the regulation of emotional experiences and expressions—in response to social and task-specific demands. Furthermore, emotional information helps students derive meaning from and assign causal attributions to events such as academic and social experiences, which influence motivation for action. Thus, it is important to understand the interplay between learners' emotions and the school environment.*

Research Questions: *Two research questions were addressed: (1) What patterns of emotional expression/suppression and emotion coaching opportunities did youth perceive in their relationships with school-based adults? and (2) What social processes do youth attribute to patterns of emotional expression or suppression?*

Participants: *Youth from urban high schools (N = 72) in California, Minnesota, and Pittsburgh participated in the study.*

Research Design: *Facilitators used a semiflexible protocol to prompt youth in 10 focus groups to discuss identity and relational development.*

Data Collection and Analysis: *Focus group sessions were recorded, and NVivo9 software was used to iteratively code and analyze verbatim transcripts.*

Findings: *Analyses revealed a strong pattern of emotional suppression in the context of relationships with educators paired with high valuation of opportunities for emotional expression. Sustained emotional suppression was commonly attributed to social expectations in schools. We discuss these results in the context of emotion socialization and school culture to suggest implications for research and practice.*

Educational experiences are often characterized by academic challenges, unfamiliar opportunities, and diverse social interactions. Because virtually all such experiences evoke emotional reactions, students may feel a full range of emotions during a single day of school —from boredom to anger, disappointment to elation, frustration to satisfaction, and pride to shame. Many of these emotions are felt in reaction to (or in anticipation of) their experiences related to learning, instruction, and academic tasks. The traditional (and still predominant) view of school-based learning has focused more attention on logical and rational cognitive functioning while treating emotions as ancillary or even disruptive (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). However, we now know that academic emotions, how they are processed, and the degree to which they are self-regulated can directly—and quite powerfully—affect students' behavior, engagement, learning, and success in school (e.g., Bower, 1992; Gross & John, 2003; Meyer & Turner, 2006).

This understanding has important implications for how educators approach instructional interactions with their students. At the same time, it presents certain challenges to both educators and educational researchers. Educational researchers are charged with the applied task of discovering how learning environments can be effectively shaped and/or altered to support beneficial emotional experiences and encourage adaptive communication and coping for diverse students of all ages. As teachers come under increasing pressure to produce demonstrable student achievement gains because of newly developed teacher evaluation systems and enact challenging pedagogy because of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, they may be more likely to think about understanding and improving emotion-related interactions as a distal goal—one that diverts time and energy from the primary task of fostering student learning. Further, high school teachers often have an overwhelming number of students passing through their classrooms each day and have little time to spend with each of them. With these challenges in mind, we start by reviewing the growing body of literature on the roles of emotions and emotion processes in adolescent development, particularly in school, as well as the potential for educators to positively affect those processes through programmatic, instructional, and school cultural changes.

In this study, we investigated adolescent perceptions of the emotional culture of their high schools by examining students' conceptualization of the role that emotions play in their relationships with school-based adults. Specifically, we explored the degree and types of self-disclosure in which students engage in school, students' perceptions of the complex social structures that they felt either allowed or disallowed the expression of emotion, and their perceptions of potential opportunities for educators to help them manage their emotions through instructional practice. We focused particular attention on the students' described patterns of emotional suppression, and the social forces that appeared to contribute to constructing and reinforcing these patterns. These insights inform various practical implications ranging from the design of instructional activities to the development of school-based social supports.

FUNCTIONS OF EMOTIONS IN SCHOOL

There is little doubt that cognitive processes play a central role in academic success. Only recently, however, have we begun to understand the contributory and inhibitory roles of emotions and emotional processes in the education of young people, and beyond. Academic emotions—emotions related to learning, instruction, or academic achievement—are thought to be precursors to engagement in school and may activate meta-strategies supportive of self-regulated learning (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). Moreover, a growing body of research shows that the better young people are at regulating their emotions and behaviors, the more likely they are to achieve academically; some evidence even suggests that such self-regulatory capacities may be *more* predictive of academic success than intelligence (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Duckworth, Tsukayama, & May, 2010). And the benefits of emotional regulation are not restricted

functioning across settings. Her work on the measurement of emotion socialization in schools recently appeared in the *Journal of School Health* (2013), and she is currently developing a related dissertation study.

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to the academic domain; children who exhibit high self-control are also more likely to enjoy later career, marital, and health benefits (Moffitt et al., 2011).

On the other hand, deficiencies in these areas often lead to behavioral problems that result in disciplinary action or academic failures (Richardson, 2000). Adolescents with lower levels of empathy and perspective-taking skills, for example, reported higher levels of aggression (Mayberry & Espelage, 2007), a behavioral pattern that is problematic in many schools. Interventions that promote students' psychosocial and psychoeducational well-being have been found to be more effective in reducing violence than those that merely increase security or discipline (Greene, 2005).

According to Pekrun, Goetz, and Titz (2002), academic emotions have implications for such important processes as the development of students' (1) self-appraisals of academic competence, (2) perceptions of control, and (3) formation of school-related values, goals, and other academically oriented attitudes, all of which predict academic success. Further, in addition to affecting learning processes such as memory encoding, storage, and retrieval (Christianson, 1992), emotions are thought to have a primary influence on decision making. For example, when individuals confront decisions about moral issues, Haidt (2001) posited that emotional processes such as empathy and guilt often engage before cognitive processes (i.e., reason); in such cases, the latter is then used to justify the former. The construction of sets of decision making or "action plans" are activated by a combination of emotional experience and contextual cues (Bower, 1992).

According to Weiner's (1996) attribution theory of motivation and emotion, people's interpretations of their own emotional experiences, as well as their interpretations of others' emotional expressions, both verbal and nonverbal, provide information on which they form casual attributions. These attributions form the basis for their working theory about the meaning of events, provide guidance for future decisions regarding behavior or action, and have been found to directly affect learning and motivation (Meyer & Turner, 2006). Attribution theory highlights the importance of educators' encouragement of students' emotion disclosure; teachers can use this information to help students make adaptive attributions in the moment and to foster students' ability to make such productive attributions independently in the future. If teachers are unaware of students' emotional processes, they are left to guess at how to help individual students transform emotional experiences into interpretations that ultimately support motivation and learning.

Importantly, past emotion research outside the field of education has tended to adopt a deficit-centered approach, focusing mostly on risk reduction and negative emotionality (possibly because of the greater salience and/or the potentially detrimental consequences of negative emotional experiences and cues); as such, positive emotions have often

Adolescence (2013) and "Subdimensions of Adolescent Sense of Belonging in High School" in *Applied Developmental Science* (2012).

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been neglected. This "negativity bias" obscures important insights about positive functioning and can be addressed by attending to the full spectrum of emotionality (Vaish, Grossmann, & Woodward, 2008). Thus, to gain a robust understanding of the emotional lives of students as acting on and being acted on by schooling, it is valuable to consider diverse emotional experiences.

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There are many outstanding questions regarding the different implications of various emotions in school. Emotions can be considered not only in terms of polarized subjective experience—that is, experiences that are perceived to be positive versus negative in valence —but also in terms of their level of psychological activation. Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2012) posited that there may be very different implications of emotions that are activating (such as excitement or anger) versus deactivating (such as relief or hopelessness) on motivational processes critical to self-regulated learning. The authors noted that traditional models of understanding emotional processes specifically in the context of learning have assumed *negative* impacts of positive emotions on learning processes. However, these theorists argue that positive *activating* emotions may in fact support many processes that lead to academic achievement. Supportive of this, positive academic emotions (enjoyment and pride) have been found not only to predict achievement but also to moderate the relationship between self-regulation and achievement (e.g., Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2012).

Conversely, multiple frameworks in the field of education posit that both activating and deactivating negative emotions are destructive to engagement and achievement and lead to maladaptive educational outcomes (Wolters & Taylor, 2012). Some research has also begun to look at the influence of particular negative emotions in specific contexts; for example, Berg (2008) found that while discussing content related to bioethical dilemmas, controversial subject matter evoked students' negative emotionality and produced *higher* degrees of engagement. Thus, emergent literature provides strong support for the need to systematically study the functions of students' diverse emotions in school—positive and negative, activating and deactivating, and as they occur in different situations.

THE BENEFITS OF EMOTIONALLY SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CONTEXTS

A well-developed body of research has demonstrated the positive association between emotionally supportive social contexts in schools— such as positive student–teacher relationships and positive classroom climates—and higher levels of academic engagement, academic achievement, better mental health, and less risky behavior (e.g., Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts, & Morrison, 2008; Somersalo, Solantaus, & Almqvist, 2002). Meyer and Turner (2006) suggested that repeated positive emotional experiences are essential to the creation of classroom climates that promote developmentally supportive student–

teacher relationships and foster motivation. Teacher–student relationships are a particularly critical component of these social contexts (Wallace, Ye, & Chhuon, 2012; Wentzel, 2010).

In particular, teachers' capacity to show empathy to students is one of the most powerful interpersonal tools teachers have to express caring, encourage engagement in school, and help students regulate behavior (Cornelius-White, 2007; Mendes, 2003). Meta-analytic and longitudinal research further suggests strong and causal links between students' emotionally supportive relationships with teachers and both affective and academic indicators of positive development (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008). Overall, positive affective bonds between students and others in their school environment are understood to be beneficial for their learning as well as their development in general.

The benefits of such positive associations further extend across developmental periods. For example, the current evidence base suggests that during the middle school years, supportive student–teacher relationships are associated with increases in self-esteem and decreases in depression (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Likewise, a supportive social culture within a high school may buffer negative effects of the transition to high school (Benner & Graham, 2009). Practices such as helping youth cope with the interpretation of "social and personal experiences" during the transition from primary to secondary school (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008, p. 217) and offering social support structures during the transition to high school (Mac Iver, 1990), which is often a difficult transition for youth, may be key to promoting positive developmental trajectories.

Educators can further play an active and purposeful role in scaffolding the emotional processing of students in ways that have both immediate and long-term benefits. For example, Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff (2000) found emotional distress to predict school problem behaviors; however, along with other factors, student perceptions of teachers' availability to assist students navigate difficult emotions in the classroom were related to adolescents' improved mental health over time and to increases in academic motivation. In the developmental psychology literature, this type of adult assistance with emotions might be conceptualized as the enactment of an *emotion coaching philosophy*, an approach to interactions that goes beyond "warmth" to include intentional actions such as attuning and responding to students' low-intensity emotions, validating feelings rather than derogating them, and scaffolding problem solving (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). We hypothesize that emotion coaching, as an aspect of a teacher's instructional practice, has the potential to aid in the development of students' adaptive emotion coping skills and other self-regulatory skills associated with social competence development, academic engagement, and school success.

One highly regarded approach to building emotion coping and other self-regulatory skills in schools involves the various programmatic

efforts typically identified under the umbrella of social and emotional learning (SEL; Greenberg et al., 2003). One of the core competencies of SEL-based programming is self-management, which involves developing emotional regulation skills. SEL programs have been found to successfully promote specifically the executive functioning and cognitive-affect regulation capacities that underlie emotional regulation (Greenberg, 2006) and, more generally, desirable school outcomes such as increases in academic engagement and achievement, and decreases in violence and dropout rates (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003). In short, there appears to be much promise for programs that explicitly target SEL-based skills to foster key competencies—such as adaptive patterns of emotion self-regulation and social competence—toward numerous desirable outcomes (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).

THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING EMOTIONALLY SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CONTEXTS

While engaging in everyday social interactions, adults and youth exchange information (often quite informally and unintentionally) about what it means to experience emotions, how events and emotions are related, and how others are likely to respond to different types of emotional expressions (Denham, Bassett, Hideko, & Wyatt, 2006). This process of emotion socialization creates norms and expectations around the expression of emotions as well as reactions to emotional expressions, both of which have the potential to activate different emotional coping patterns. An emotional culture that tends to invalidate or punish expressions of emotion may be more likely to activate patterns of emotional suppression than an emotional culture in which expressions are supported by empathic validation and coaching efforts.

There are notable challenges to the successful implementation of SEL-related programs and curricula. Perhaps the most predominant of these is the prevalence of a "programs and packages" mindset that decontextualizes SEL and prevents schoolwide integration of curricular goals (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003, p. 303). Moreover, districts may encounter challenges to adopting formal SEL programs, including financial constraints, time restrictions, or a prioritized focus on test preparation necessitated by external accountability systems (see Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003).

Even in an SEL-rich environment in which children and youth participate in exercises strategically designed to foster healthy patterns of emotion regulation—including socially appropriate expression—the lessons may not be actualized in the reality of classroom life if such expressions are not invited, modeled, and supported (i.e., coached) in an authentic way within everyday instructional interactions. Thus, although the SEL agenda endorses a research-based conceptualization of social and emotional competence in which the ability to communicate emotions is a cornerstone, in any given classroom, there could be a fundamental disconnect between this teaching and social reality.

So, the challenges of promoting emotional regulation and communication extend beyond some people's aversion to the "programs and packages" approach. As Gillies (2011) insightfully noted, "Somewhat paradoxically, the actual display of emotions in the context of the classroom marks out the emotionally illiterate." This disconnect implies that even if educators tell students that expression is healthy and welcome, when the teacher response to such emotional expressions is usually negative or unsuccessful, the real lesson taught is that suppression is the standard. If this happens continually overtime, it engenders a confusing double standard of sorts for students in which emotional suppression actually becomes the more socially "adaptive" pattern in school. The likely outcome, then, is a pattern of systematic emotional suppression.

However, such systematic emotional suppression has been shown across numerous studies to be maladaptive for individuals and bad for relationships (see, for example, Gross & Levenson, 1993; Petrie, Booth, & Pennebaker, 1998; Richards & Gross, 1999; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009). This means that it is important to consider how teachers can promote positive social and emotional development within everyday interactions, whether in the presence or absence of formal SEL programs or curricula. The creation of an authentic social culture that invites and supports emotion disclosure and allows it to be socially adaptive is key, albeit challenging in itself.

EMOTIONAL COPING IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Understanding how expressive behaviors interact with a particular social environment (school or otherwise) is dependent on the ways in which expressions actually impact the quality of relationships in that environment. It is this understanding, rather than the selection of the most beneficial emotional coping patterns, that differentiates an emotionally competent adolescent from an emotionally incompetent one in a social sense. Thus, emotional competence in a social context such as a school is defined by that context, for better or for worse.

Two commonly examined emotion coping strategies are (1) emotional suppression, choosing not to communicate an emotional state, and (2) cognitive reappraisal, constructing understanding of events in ways that change how they are experienced emotionally. Suppression has been shown to have negative consequences for psychological, social, and short- and long-term physiological functioning (Gross & Levenson, 1993; Petrie et al., 1998; Richards & Gross, 1999; Srivastava et al., 2009). For example, Gross and John (2003) found suppression to be associated with less adaptive personal and relational development, and cognitive reappraisal with more adaptive personal and relational development. In particular, the authors noted that suppression is enacted in response to an emotional experience—and is a coping strategy that affords no outlet for either emotional release or behaviors

affecting environmental change—whereas reappraisal allows individuals to anticipate emotional experiences and change their thinking in ways that actually change the way they experience emotional events.

In addition to increasing the salience of positive emotions in terms of subjective experience, taking communicative action has the potential to change contextual factors for the benefit of the self or others. For example, "expressing emotions can change the social environment; thus, suppressing emotions makes it less likely that situations that upset the individual will change for the better" (Gross & John, 2003, p. 354). Expression that is socially competent opens the door for communication that can benefit the social actors by influencing environmental change, strengthening relationships, and building emotional competence.

Although suppressing emotions is generally not a desirable behavioral pattern, the regulatory skill enabling individuals to filter emotional expressions is valuable—it is not necessarily adaptive to freely express all emotions with total abandon. Socially competent individuals have the ability to take into consideration the effect that their actions will have on others and their social environment, which is a skill that typically developing adolescents have acquired (Saarni, 1999). That said, socially constructed expectations in any given context may or may not be congruent with the emotional coping strategies most adaptive for individuals and facilitative of supportive relationships.

It is important to note that emotional cultures in which children are socialized at home may clash with the expectations students find waiting within the school building. For example, Townsend (2000) argued that the communicative patterns of many African American youth, such as speaking in an impassioned and emotive way that is punctuated by frequent use of nonverbal gestures, is often misinterpreted by European American teachers as disrespectful. She described how this and other cultural disconnects contribute to the disproportionate disciplinary action against African American students in U.S. schools, which in turn systematically inflates the rates of suspension and expulsion of African American youth. This possibility highlights an important reason to closely examine educators' responses to students' emotional expression in schools (in particular, urban schools)—in this case, even when students may not find their own actions particularly expressive, teachers may find them so expressive that they take disciplinary action.

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN ADOLESCENCE

It is also important to consider developmental expectations as they differ across elementary to secondary school. As children age, adults expect their emotional competence to become more advanced; therefore, responses to emotional behaviors are somewhat contingent on developmental status (Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007). The development of emotional competence is largely a social process, beginning in infancy (Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2007).

Though some children show signs of developing emotional competence, it is not until adolescence that Saarni (1999, p. 16) posited that life experience has prompted sufficient character and identity development to foster "mature" emotional competence. Saarni (1999) has presented a developmental perspective on emotional competence that traces typical developmental markers through the trajectory but warned that the process is "indeterminate in length and may even extend its influence across generations" (p. 17).

According to this perspective, normative emotion regulation and coping skills in adolescence include "awareness of one's own emotion cycles (e.g., guilt about feeling angry)," which "facilitates insightful coping" and "increasing integration of moral character and personal philosophy in dealing with stress and subsequent decisions" (Saarni, 1999, p. 19). In turn, typically developing adolescents are able to manage others' impressions through purposeful expressive behaviors and thus gain control over self-presentation. Well-developed emotional competence at this stage further entails an understanding of how expressing and discussing emotions impact the quality of relationships. It is this awareness that allows adolescents to acutely perceive and respond to the expectations of adults in their social world surrounding the expression (or suppression) of emotions.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The primary objective of the current study is to explore youths' perspectives on school-based emotional expression, emotional suppression, and emotion coaching in urban high schools. In this research, we adopt Meyer and Turner's (2006) definition of "emotions" as a combination of Rosenberg's (1998) definition of emotions as "short, intense episodes, or states" and Frijda's (1988) position that "emotions are subjective experiences with situational meaning that evoke action states" (p. 379). This definition distinguishes situated reactions to particular stimuli as distinct from traitlike affect, such as "liking" a particular class, or sustained mood, like feeling "grumpy" on a particular day.

To examine the nature of the social messages that students receive about appropriate emotional coping strategies in school, we addressed two research questions: (1) What patterns of emotional expression/suppression and emotion coaching opportunities did youth perceive in their relationships with school-based adults? (2) What social processes do youth attribute to patterns of emotional expression or suppression?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

In the fall of 2010, a total of 72 youths from California, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania participated in 10 focus groups sessions. Recruitment took place through several high school dropout prevention youth development programs located in urban settings. Sites were specifically chosen to prioritize the voices of youth often marginalized in conversations about educational reform and equity. Each adolescent participated in one focus group, and each focus group had an average of 7 participants. The location and composition of each focus group depended on the structural and programmatic features of the recruitment site. For example, one program was housed in the central office of the public school district, whereas another was located in a community meeting room in a public housing complex. Composition of the focus groups reflected the overall participant demographics of the population the recruitment sites primarily served. Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of the sample. The World Health Organization's Family Affluence Scale (FAS II; Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006; alpha = .87) provided information about participants' familial wealth. On a scale of 1 to 6, the mean score observed was 3.67 (SD = 1.14), indicating a midrange family affluence level relative to the global population.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample

City, State	N	Age (years) $M(SD)$	Gender (%) M	Race/Ethnicity (%)					
				Black/ African American	White/ European American	Asian American	American Indian	Multiracial	Latino/a
Pittsburgh, PA	37	16.4(1.4)	68	73	16	0	2.7	8	0
Los Angeles, CA	22	17.1(0.9)	55	0	5	45	0	32	18
Minneapolis, MN	13	17.3(1.3)	100	23	8	15	15	0	38

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Facilitators used a protocol to elicit youths' perspectives on their experiences, including "dimensions and aspects of relationships with parents, peers and teachers" (Chhuon & Wallace, 2012). As part of a larger study focused on adolescents' sense of belonging in high school, the protocol was developed to explore how specific experiences and relationships contributed to either enhancing or undermining this perception. We approached each focus group with the intention of collaboration, and we strategically designed for opportunities for adolescents to feel prepared and comfortable working with us. For example, each focus group started with an introduction to the big idea of identity work and included a quiet reflection time for adolescents to individually connect with the topic of the focus group before we began to ask questions. (See Appendix A for a copy of the protocol.) By being intentional about making the researchers' knowledge base explicit and allowing time for each participant to connect that to his or her personal fund of knowledge coming into the group, we hoped to increase the integrity of both the data collection process and the resulting data generated from the groups.

Recognizing also that comfort level may vary across participants, the groups started with two hands-on activities that did not require verbal participation to contribute thoughts and opinions. That we recruited adolescents from existing youth development programs aided in the comfort level of the participants with each other. It seems that this familiarity among participants led to natural conversational responses to the facilitator prompts, as evidenced by participation patterns gradually shifting as the focus group progressed. Across all groups, the start of most of the focus groups consisted of single participant responses to a facilitator's prompt. As the conversation progressed, however, adolescents reacted and responded directly to each other. On average, these adolescent reactions to each other's comments, without prompting from the facilitator, involved four conversational turns. This natural progression of increased participation allowed for the facilitators to take a rather hands-off approach to perceived "off topic" comments; the participants either naturally redirected the point back to the focus of the conversation, ignored the comment, or directly stated to the participant that they had said something not as relevant to the topic under discussion. So although the facilitators employed an informal conversational approach that allowed students to interject and add follow-up comments whenever they felt moved to do so, the prior relationships among the participants were the central design feature that allowed for rich conversations in each group. Our university's institutional review board approved the focus group protocol and consenting procedures.

PROCEDURES

Employing the methods of interpretative science (Erickson, 1986), our analysis focused exclusively on adolescent meaning making. Participant meaning making is often most accessible to researchers in the stories participants tell as well as the working definitions and the descriptions

embedded within those stories (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Thus, we designed the protocol to elicit adolescent storytelling to generate a data set able to support the exploration of adolescent sense making around their school-based experiences, specifically their relationships and interactions relevant to identity work in schools. So although we defined the broad topic of interest a priori, we remained open to emergent areas of focus dependent on our findings. The findings we report here represent the most robust (i.e., consistent across and within focus groups) commonalities in adolescents' interpretations of the emotional culture of high schools.

Focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data reduction and analysis occurred through several iterative cycles of transcript coding using NVivo9 software. First-cycle coding included the use of structural codes associated with protocol items. Later rounds of coding included development of conceptual content codes. This occurred through multiple rounds of independent coding followed by frequent codebook development and testing meetings as part of a project with a larger scope. Conceptual codes were created both a priori in accordance with relevant literature and the focus group protocol content, and inductively, emerging from careful interpretation of the data. Hierarchical coding structures (coding trees) were data driven and developed over time, with most codes treated as "free nodes" (Bazely, 2007) at the onset of development to allow maximum flexibility. During codebook development, we conducted periodic co-occurrence queries and monitored interrater agreement by regularly examining coding stripe densities. These measures supported the refinement of coding definitions, logical hierarchical grouping of codes, and collapsing of redundant concepts.

Final codes from the full codebook that were relevant to the specific research questions addressed in this article are included in hierarchical form in Appendix B. These codes (and some structural codes) were used to identify and understand relevant portions of transcripts. We then reexamined these coded portions of the transcripts with the original surrounding text restored to avoid misunderstanding decontextualized information. After reading through this full corpus of contextualized data, we developed and applied three new thematic codes on a vignette level: emotion suppression, emotion expression, and emotion coaching. The resulting coded data were used to make sense of the participants' understanding of and meaning-making processes around emotion-related communication between students and educators. For a fuller illustration of this process, including examples, see Appendix B.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we address the two research questions presented previously. The first is exploratory in nature, seeking to describe naturally occurring emotional communication patterns that youth perceive; the second is explanatory in nature, seeking to understand

youths' causal reasoning about these patterns. Our analysis focuses on interpretations of participants' expressed perceptions of and perspectives on their experiences in high school.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT PATTERNS OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION/SUPPRESSION AND EMOTION COACHING OPPORTUNITIES DID YOUTH PERCEIVE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOL-BASED ADULTS?

There were three main findings for this first research question: (1) emotional expression directed toward teachers—particularly expression of negative emotions—was relatively rare; (2) the opportunities for emotional expression and coaching that did exist were highly valued; and (3) individual differences existed in high school students' willingness to express their emotions.

Rare Negative Expression to School-Based Adults

Generally, students reported an inability or unwillingness to express emotions—particularly negatively valenced emotions—to adults in school, representing a common pattern of emotional suppression in the context of relationships with school-based adults. Across focus groups, many students spoke of feelings as "private," and the disclosure of feelings (typically in reference to negative emotions) as a highly personal act not to be displayed in school.

One example can be found in the following exchange between the facilitator and two male participants, which occurred when the facilitator probed the participants regarding what information they conceptualized as part of one's public identity versus what information is part of one's private identity. The facilitator held up five content category cards, which read: "Goals, Feelings, Likes and Dislikes, Strengths and Weaknesses, and Interests" and asked:

Facilitator:

Which areas do you think you know less about Snoop Dog [a popular rapper], if you . . . had to pick one?

Everybody has the same card, "feelings." Why?

Participant 1:

 Because nobody really knows how he feels. . .

Participant 2:

Unless he's the type of guy that actually shows his feelings and like he's . . . like the type of guy that like takes it out on things and starts throwing

stuff, you know, and he's got anger problems and all that. That's the type of guy, where you know how he feels. . .

This exchange also demonstrates the participants' overwhelming tendency to highlight negative emotions in their discussions about feelings, especially when describing instances of emotions at school. In another example, a male participant offered an account of his interpretation of what happens in classrooms: "Like, [the teacher] is trying to embarrass people, you know. . . . You want to react in a different way, mad, you know?" The prevalence of discussion of these types of negative emotions may be partially due to the negative emotion bias described by Vaish et al. (2008). However, the participants' comments may indicate a common perception that in the school context, activating negative emotions abound. Furthermore, the participants' preoccupation with negative emotions may suggest that to them, there was rarely a socially appropriate way to express activating negative emotionality in school. Interestingly, the (relatively few) students who suggested that teachers should attend to students' emotional states almost exclusively mentioned predicting and interpreting negative emotional states in both activating and deactivating forms ("mad" or "sad"). It follows from this that youth may not perceive that there is a "safe" space within high schools for the enactment of emotion coping skills, and few, if any, opportunities for emotion coaching interactions

Valuation and Examples of Opportunities for Emotional Expression and Coaching

In the relatively rare instances in which opportunities for appropriate emotional expression and resulting support (including emotion coaching) in the high school setting did occur, students consistently reported highly valuing them and provided numerous anecdotal accounts of such exchanges in the focus groups. This is consistent with literature suggesting that instances of emotional expression allow the opportunity for a positive change in the environment (Gross & John, 2003), as well as the position that teachers' expression of empathy is a key component of supportive student–teacher relationships (Mendes, 2003). In these instances, the breaking down of certain constraining interpersonal barriers (described in the next subsection) seemed to allow for authentic emotional expression and emotion coaching interactions between school-based adults and students. When describing the nature of positive and supportive interpersonal relationships, participants often mentioned those in which their emotional states were made transparent. For example, when asked to describe an instance in which she really felt "known" at school, one participant said, "My Spanish teacher, sometimes she would notice when I'm feeling down or happier, you know?" This participant went on to explain how the Spanish teacher was able to put an interpersonal problem into perspective and help her cope with a troubling situation. As an instantiation of emotion coaching, this example highlights how meeting psychological needs may matter to students' perceptions of relational quality.

Other participants also detailed distinctly isolated experiences during which they were able to connect on a personal level with teachers or other school-based adults. For example, a participant described an emotion coaching experience when prompted to think about a situation in which he felt that a school-based adult really knew or understood him:

There was this one time I was with this guy who helps you look for jobs . . . and I sat down with the guy and I was telling him, "You know I'm nervous," and all this and "I'm scared 'cause it's the first time I'm going to have a job." He was just giving me all this good advice and making me feel better where I can just come out and open up and tell him more things. . .

In this young man's experience, a school-based support staff, in this case a career coach, provided a safe space for the expression of emotion. This provision fostered the perception of feeling understood or known within the school context for this youth. To illustrate the ideal version of a student–teacher relationship, several students in different focus groups initiated discussion of the teacher in the movie *Freedom Writers*, describing how the teacher in that movie took the time to understand her urban students' feelings and backgrounds despite the perceived boundaries differentiating along lines of race, ethnicity, and social class. This kind of authenticity between students and teacher portrayed in the movie was used as a contrast to experiences that youth perceived as a limited ability to feel connected on an emotional level with school-based adults. For example, a male youth expressed, "They don't know nothing about your background or none of that and none of your problems or anything. They don't know when you're mad. They don't know when you're having problems." The salience and prevalence of the *Freedom Writers* case example, consistently interpreted by the participants as an accurate portrayal of their everyday experiences of alienation and anonymity in school, provide a sense of just how rare adolescents perceived opportunities for emotional expression and coaching.

Individual Differences in Emotional Expression

Some participants reported being generally open with feelings regardless of social context or, conversely, generally keeping feelings to themselves altogether. For example, this male youth reported a general pattern of suppression across contexts:

We don't really like to talk about our feelings a lot [laughs] . . . 'cause everybody just gets through everything by themselves. It feels like all of us, we're all growing up, so we just like face it by our self, because nobody's going to be there for us forever, and we're all going to be independent.

Though having individual differences in emotional tendencies toward expression and suppression of emotions is consistent with theory that attributes patterns of emotional coping partially to more stable personality traits (Gross & John, 2003), the ways others socialize emotional expression, discussion, and experiential meaning making is an important and salient influence in childhood (Eisenberg et al., 1998) as well as in adolescence (Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007).

In summary, students described a school environment in which suppression was the default. Yet, when provided opportunities to recount experiences of feeling known at school, youth described interactions with school-based adults within which emotions were expressed, validated, and understood. Taken together, these findings may suggest that when students are asked to consider whether teachers *in general* do or should know their feelings, they position emotional disclosure outside of these social structures; however, when given the opportunity to reflect on *specific* examples of *particular* teachers or other educators with whom they have shared a meaningful exchange, they recognize the positive potential of emotion-centered interaction.

One moderating factor that might help to explain how emotional expression can be at the same time highly valued and relatively rare is the degree to which students trust and respect their teachers. When students trust their teachers, they are more likely to feel comfortable expressing their emotions (Meyer & Turner, 2006). However, students' levels of trust in and respect for teachers *in general* are typically relatively low; at the same time, most students have, or have had, at least one *particular* teacher with whom they have established a strong rapport and emotional connection (Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations, 2013).

Isolated instances of emotion coaching in which limiting interpersonal boundaries have been breached provide valuable information about the opportunities that do exist within adolescent–educator relationships in high school. We now turn to an examination of the nature of these boundaries, the social processes that create and uphold them, and how these limitations are sometimes overcome.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT SOCIAL PROCESSES DO YOUTH ATTRIBUTE TO PATTERNS OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION OR SUPPRESSION?

There were three main findings for this second research question: (1) perceptions of social norms, such as expectations of emotional suppression and interpersonal emotional boundaries with teachers, contributed to how adolescents expressed their emotions in high school; (2) students perceived teachers' interpretations of their expressions of

negative emotions as acts of defiance; and (3) students expressed mixed messages regarding which school-based adults and what specific school contexts were best equipped to provide emotion coaching.

Emotional Suppression and Interpersonal Emotional Boundaries as Social Norms

Student relationships with school-based adults, according to the participants, were not conducive to emotional expression because of the social expectations that students perceived. Across focus groups, participants indicated a common perception that the social norms within the educational settings supported emotional suppression and inhibited emotional expression. In general, emotional suppression seemed to emerge as the socially accepted coping mechanism for students to employ during school-based interactions with adults. Revelatory of this, one female participant referred specifically to the perception of cultural norms that dictated that the students' expression of emotions to educators is inappropriate: "I think teachers need to get to know you like in the goals and interests area . . . but not in the feelings area because that's kind of a respect boundary." For this student, the idea of students readily expressing emotions to teachers was not merely uncomfortable, it represented an act of disrespect. This resonates with Gillies's (2011) argument that despite the push for teaching emotion disclosure as an adaptive pattern, the social structure of schools does not typically support this pattern.

Several students described this interpersonal emotional boundary hinging on respect in strikingly similar ways and suggested that students typically perceived the expression of "feelings" as situated on the outside of the socially acceptable interpersonal boundary between students and educators. This kind of separation of emotion disclosure from interpersonal relationships with school-based adults may indicate that sustained participation in social interactions in schools over time has socialized high school students to perceive that emotional *suppression* is expected in the context of student–educator relationships. For example, in discussing what specific types of content a teacher should know about her student, one female participant said, "The feelings thing changes things because it's supposed to be a teacher and student relationship. When you put feelings in it, it makes it like a friendship, but it's not supposed to be." This participant clearly illustrated her belief that students' disclosure of emotional states to teachers is largely an unacceptable action. The explicit exclusion or pushing out of content related to feelings within adolescent–educator relationships may indicate the degree to which students have internalized the apparent norm of emotion suppression within school contexts.

The existence of a distinct interpersonal emotional boundary described by this participant was reinforced by other participants. For example, during a discussion of whether certain aspects of one's self are public or private, one male participant commented that feelings might be public

"between like family, but they mainly come out with friends in school." However, when prompted about times youth "felt known" at school, many youth recounted positive relational interactions with teachers during which the youth engaged in emotional expression and teachers responded by offering support through emotion coaching and problem-solving efforts. Take, for example, this exchange between the moderator and a male participant:

Participant:

My language arts teacher, he took his time one day. I wasn't really doing good in school because I had other stuff in my head, and he took his time to like talk to me after school, and we pretty much just went through all of these things—feelings, likes, dislikes, and goals.

Facilitator:

Other teachers didn't do that?

Participant:

No. Other teachers are just interested in your learning, even if you're just sitting there not doing nothing, some teachers will just call to you and tell you, "Hey, do your work." But they'll never tell you, like, "Oh, what's wrong? Are you feeling all right? Do you need something?" or stuff like that. "Do your work, if you're not doing anything in class you get a referral." Stuff like that.

This excerpt exemplifies a student's valuation of the affordance of an opportunity for emotion coaching amid a school culture that propagates a lack of emotional information flow between students and teachers. Also, this student's description of teachers using disciplinary threats, like office referrals, to reengage students who may be struggling emotionally because of the experience of deactivating negative emotion alludes to another salient theme: the interpretation of negative emotionality as defiant behavior.

Notably, some of the focus group data suggest the possibility that the role of social norms related to emotional expression may be conditioned by setting-level characteristics. One female student reflected on experiences in middle school and explained the difference in the relationships she had with teachers in middle school and those with her high school teachers in the following exchange:

Facilitator:

You said in middle school, though, you had like your teachers knew you.

Were you able to share with them your true feelings, your private identity feelings then?

Participant:

Well, I think they already knew what I was feeling. Even though I

didn't show it, they asked me if anything was going on. Like, I don't know, they asked me "how's it going?" and stuff, and probably at that time I'm feeling bad. So then I just like tell that one person.

Although more evidence is needed to make a substantial claim, this description points to the possibility of a shift in social norms around emotional expression during the transition from middle to high school; though it is notable that even in the more emotionally open relationships she described having in middle school, this student positioned emotions as something she likely hadn't purposefully "shown." Instead, this student expressed valuation of the middle school teachers' abilities to elicit emotional disclosure, as well as her willingness to disclose her feelings once given the opportunity. Furthermore, that this student's distinction between student–teacher relational structures in middle school versus high school is centered on emotional attunement is particularly salient because of the potential for emotionally supportive social structures to smooth the challenging transition to high school, as previous research has suggested (see, for example, Benner & Graham, 2009; Mac Iver, 1990).

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Expressions of Negative Emotions as Acts of Defiance

It may be the case that in student–teacher interactions in which the student is perceived to express negative emotions (or even *mis*perceived to express negative emotions, as in the earlier example of nondisruptive behavioral disengagement due to emotional dysregulation), the teacher interprets these expressions as acts of defiance. These perceived acts of defiance in turn can have disciplinary consequences that negatively affect students. Thus, students' interpretation of the "feelings" barrier between students and school-based adults is likely in part due to students' expectations of the nature and valence of feelings experienced in school and the social meanings behind experiencing and expressing them.

When youth referred to expressions of negative emotionality in the focus groups, such expressions were consistently categorized as "misbehavior," and frequently in terms of anger. Participants repeatedly spoke of experiencing feelings of anger in reaction to teachers' actions; for example, during a discussion about what teachers should know about their students, a male participant commented, "A teacher might tell you that you have to wait to go to the bathroom, and you might be cool with it. But if they tell me that, I might just slowly get mad; walk out or something." This depiction of a hypothetical emotional expression underscores the misconception that emotional expression in school is often perceived as synonymous with misbehavior, even from the perspectives of students. Here, the student appeared to have perceived very limited options. He described a hypothetical situation in which the enforcement of control over his ability to use the restroom makes him "slowly get mad." In the face of this type of demand, he seemed to imagine two possible scenarios: one in which a student "is cool with it,"

or has a neutral reaction, versus one in which a student is angered. As he took the role of the angered student in his own example, his hypothetical course of action in the face of the emotional experience was one that the teacher likely would have perceived as defiance and misbehavior, namely walking out. On the other hand, the suppression of this emotion and compliance with the teacher's demand would be the accepted behavior within the social structure of the student–teacher relationship but would limit his ability to change the situation so that his needs could be met. This student did not describe an alternative course of action that would allow for appropriate emotional expression leading to a change in the situation while still upholding the social norms of the context.

Mixed Messages Regarding Where and From Whom to Get Emotion Coaching

Further illustrating the social structures that discourage emotional disclosure between students and teachers in high school, participants commented that students are expected to go to counselors or other specified places, such as "emotional support classes," to express negative emotions and receive "help" from adults to solve school-based problems. For example, when asked to whom in school he might go for emotional support, a male participant said, "I think a counselor, like he's only there to help you and a teacher might be someone just there to teach you." These comments suggest that students believe emotional support is not within the purview of teachers; rather, there is a designated place outside the classroom, and ancillary to it, for addressing emotional issues. However, one female participant illustrated the culture of suppression in student–teacher relationships and also extended it to relationships with counselors in the following comment: "It might be a problem at home or it might be some emotions, but, um, for teachers or counselors and stuff to notice that happening and stuff, it kind of links the point to like, you're, like the student is a bad person or something." Thus, this student's understanding seemed to be that when a teacher or even a counselor noticed a student's negative emotionality, he or she formed highly negative views of that student regardless of the nature of his or her role in the management of students' emotionality. For example, even if the role of a counselor might be understood by students to include such things as helping students who are distressed (more so than the role of a teacher), students may fear that disclosing such distress reflects poorly on them nonetheless. Even with the sense that specialized places or personnel in schools exist to help with the emotional side of life, students did not generally report that such support systems were sufficient. The following exchange illustrates this lack of sufficiency:

Facilitator:

Why don't students do that [go to counselors]?

Participant 1:

They don't—usually students think it's dumb or something like that.

Participant 2:

They think it's not the cool way.

Participant 1:

Or they find an excuse . . . we don't have time, or I don't like my counselor . . . I think they should show a more appealing way or something to catch your attention, or a student's attention, to try to go to these things, and I think that some teachers should actually look into how students feel and what they should know about the students.

A male participant in another focus group suggested that students should have regular meetings with counselors, who should then report back to teachers so that teachers would understand their students better:

I think talking with, um, counselors as a weekly or monthly check-up, talk with your counselors just privately about what's going on with your life and what you're doing and where you're going, that would help the counselors, and from the counselors it could go to the teachers, and from there the teachers could find out what the students need help and all kinds of other things.

Despite some of the ethical and legal issues related to this suggestion, this youth's insights suggest that, as many scholars of positive youth development have argued, optimal development is most likely to occur when a holistic, integrative, and interactive approach is taken by the various adults who inhabit each of the young person's ecologies (e.g., Bundick, Yeager, King, & Damon, 2010).

Though students presumably spend more time with teachers than counselors, the transience of relationships with teachers was also mentioned by focus group participants as a potential barrier to emotion coaching in school. Some youth reported that their relationships with coaches and other adults in the school building were substantively different, allowing for a more authentic disclosure of self, including emotional experiences and states. This is likely at least in part because, by virtue of "the coach" role as overseer of activities in which students can remain involved across grade levels, these adults have more of an opportunity to build and maintain relationships with students over time.

One male youth described a relationship with a coach that survived the transition from middle to high school in the following way:

Our track coach, we was connected to him a lot . . . we moved on to another school, like a ninth grade higher level, and then we still go back to talk to our old track coach because we was more connected to him than other teachers . . . he makes us feel like he's one of us. And he

acts in a way that is easier on us, and he tries to understand where we are coming from, and if we have a problem he'll try and talk it out with us.

The valuable opportunity to "talk it out" in the face of problems or challenges was a repeated theme—something that students reported to be rare but highly beneficial. Also, students' perceptions of the primary location of school-based adults, such as coaches, as being "outside of school" may be another important distinction; for example, a male participant commented that, "Like a coach . . . if you're outside of school also, so like you lose a game and you get mad, so I guess they know how you feel about things. Yeah, they know. They can relate to you."

An interesting similarity across descriptions of instances of emotion disclosure, independent of where and with whom this disclosure occurred, lies in the mode of transmission of emotional state information. Participants emulated instances in which others were able to detect their emotional states *without* the need for (1) their own initiation of discussion via explicit verbal expression, or (2) socially inappropriate actions—such as the earlier example of "throwing stuff." One male student explained that when people understand you,

They don't have to ask simple questions, "Are you mad?" if they know if you're mad or not. They can go by body language. They can go by just the way the tone of your voice is. Yeah, just by the way you move or you walk. They know something's wrong.

The importance of an adult's ability to detect and respond to low-intensity emotional expressions and thus prevent a downward emotional spiral is exactly what Gottman et al. (1996) advocated as a key feature of an emotion coaching philosophy. It seems that likewise, in this *culture of suppression*, educators may need to take the initiative to open the channels of communication by picking up on subtle signals that do not depend on youth going against social norms to disclose their emotional state.

CONCLUSION

Research demonstrates that school contexts that discourage the expression and discussion of emotions in socially acceptable ways limit the ability of students to develop as motivated, engaged learners and socially and emotionally competent individuals. Further, such contexts restrict teachers' ability to support and enhance positive youth development. Our data suggest that the accumulation of emotionally relevant experiences in schools socialize youth to (1) conceptualize school-based emotions as negative and unproductive, and (2) internalize social norms around emotional communication that strongly reinforce emotional suppression. Given the perceived likelihood for

misunderstanding and frequent mischaracterization of emotional expression as defiance or disengagement, the expression of emotion can be classified, in some particular school contexts, as a high-risk endeavor.

Because "society determines children's understanding of emotions by inducting them into an emotional culture, defining the criteria of emotional competence, and regulating their exposure to emotional episodes" (Gordon, 1991, p. 319), future research should explore the processes of developing emotional cultures in school at various levels (such as district, school, and classroom). A key goal should be developing an understanding of how "emotional competence" in a particular social context (e.g., a classroom) may be defined and enacted in ways that are healthy for individuals and relationships alike. Also, further exploration of differences that may exist between emotional cultures in early, middle, and later years of schooling, as well as among different types of school settings (e.g., urban vs. nonurban, secular vs. sectarian) will provide insights into particular areas of need and the types of support needed. For example, sudden changes in emotional expectations and available supports may contribute to adjustment problems during transitions from elementary to middle school and middle to high school.

Emotionally supportive institutional cultures may be especially critical for youth who attend urban public high schools. Often, these students experience such sources of school-based stress as metal detectors at the entrance, full-time police officers patrolling the hallways, and video surveillance in all corners of the school building (Brown, 2010). Further, racial and cultural differences in expressive patterns forged outside the school should be attended to because these cultural misunderstandings may cause disproportionate disciplinary action, including suspension and expulsion (Townsend, 2000). Whereas institutional cultures based on suspicion and distrust may exacerbate the emotional state of heightened arousal that students living in urban neighborhoods bring to schools (Lee, 2010), cultures of empathy within schools that promote relational development, foster social and emotional competence, and offer safe spaces to receive and process emotions in socially accepted ways may be critically important to reducing the opportunity gaps that persist in U.S. urban schools.

Considering these data in relation to the previously discussed theory, encouraging the expression of emotions in ways that do not detract from instructional agendas may be valuable. When youth share emotional experiences with adults in school, those adults have opportunities to encourage the activation of adaptive emotional coping strategies such as cognitive reappraisal. Likewise, an emotion coaching interaction can assist with the formation of adaptive attributions that support motivation and engagement, and encourage adaptive decision-making processes and action plans.

The shift to allowing, encouraging, and coaching the expression of emotional states in school is not a new idea. In his well-renowned book *Freedom to Learn,* Carl Rogers (1969) advocated authentic emotional communication between students and teachers. More recently, Sylwester (1994) presented strategies for integrating emotional expression into classrooms and prescribed using dialogue with "continuous emotional input" while working to reconcile interpersonal conflicts in school. Learning and memory, relational development, and motivation and engagement are all of high relevance to researchers and practitioners alike—and all these are intimately tied to emotional experience.

In light of the present findings, we believe it is critical to understand more thoroughly how students are experiencing the emotional cultures in schools, particularly the patterns of interactions between students and teachers and the ways these patterns influence the larger social patterns of emotional expression. This knowledge could provide important insights into how emotional cultures in schools can be improved, particularly through the integration of real opportunities for safe emotional expression and stronger emotion coaching structures. Previous research and well-supported theory suggest that this shift would help students to thrive emotionally, relationally, and academically.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Protocol

I want each of you to think quietly about all the different aspects of your
life. You are a unique person with particular interests, likes and dislikes,
goals, and feelings. You also have different relationships and expected
behaviors as a student, son, daughter, brother, sister, aunt, uncle,
father and mother for some of you, athlete, church member, I could go
on and on listing different relationships and roles that you have. You
may find that between all of the other things you need to balance in
your life, it gets pretty complicated.

In adolescent psychology we have a term to describe what young
people your age are doing right now as you try to put the puzzle pieces
of your life together, it is called Identity Formation. You are trying to
answer the question of "Who Am I?" "Keepin' it Real" can be pretty hard
when you feel that there are about 3 or 4 "yous" out there all competing
inside your head.

So, how much do the adults in your life know about the real you? Let's start there.

There are some lines on the floor. The colored blue line represents "knowing everything" and the cream-colored line represents "knowing nothing." This middle area would be somewhere in the middle, as in knowing about half.

Please stand up and move to the place on the line where you think captures how much the adults in your life know about you.

For those of you that are standing around the blue line, you all feel that the adults in your life know everything about you. Let's talk about this. Who wants to start? What makes you feel that the adults know so much?

For those of you that are standing around the cream-colored line, you all feel that the adults in your life know nothing about you. Let's talk about this. Who wants to start? What makes you feel that the adults know so little?

And we have folks in the middle? What are you all thinking about what the adults know?

All right, now I want to know specifically about people at school.

I want you to think about your school experiences and the relationships you have at school In general, how well do you think the adults, such as teachers and staff, at school know you?

There was _____ of movement around on this line.

O.K. We can sit down now. Thanks for playing along.

I need someone to help me out here. Who is a celebrity or famous person that you all know?

O.K. Using _____ as an example, think about what you know about his/her public self or identity. Do we know his/her interests, likes/dislikes, goals, feelings?

What do we really know about him/her? What caused some of you to say "not very much?"

So, when you all were moving around on the line, were you thinking about your private or public identity?

What shapes your feelings of how you feel known?

Are some of these aspects of you HOLD UP CARDS [interests, likes/dislikes, strengths/weaknesses, goals, feelings] more private or more public?

What shapes your decision to share certain parts of you to others?

Can you tell me if "being known" is the same as "being accepted" or feeling like you "fit in"?

Let's pretend that we are in charge of teaching teachers and staff how to get to know their students? We are teacher educators!

First, what do teachers need to know about their students?

Second, how should teachers go about learning this information?

Is it different between teachers and other staff, say administrators, coaches, or activity leaders, security guards? How so?

I want each of you to think of a moment, maybe at school, where you had a moment when you thought, "Wow, I feel good here. This person really knows me. I feel super connected!" Can anyone talk to the group about this feeling? What made you feel this way?

I can imagine feeling at times misunderstood in school—that what you know about yourself does not match up with what others know. I want you each to think quietly about this, and if you feel like sharing a story about this happening to you, please do.

Before we end, is there anything that you would like to add to the conversation? Thank you so much for your time today. We very much appreciate your time.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Transcript Coding Process

Selected concept codes were chosen from the final version of a much larger codebook for their relevance to these particular research questions. These codes, listed in hierarchical order below, were used first to isolate portions of transcripts for analysis. Note: only subcodes that were used for this process are listed; the full codebook includes several more subcodes under both *aspects of self* and *support.*

Aspects of self

Feelings (AoS-F)

Personal disclosure (Dis)

Support

Catharsis (Sup-C)

Sharing of difficulties (Sup-D)

Soothing (Sup-S)

Empathizing (Emp)

Because these codes were applied at the micro level, coding queries returned small bits of decontextualized text. For example, a query for *feelings* returned a list of quotes like this one:

(AoS-F) Yes, my Spanish teacher, um, sometimes she would notice when I'm feeling down or happier, you know? I think there was this one time where I was just really upset because, um, socially I'm not doing well.

Though the examination of these—especially as they co-occurred, provided useful information, to only analyze the above bits of text individually would have necessitated somewhat high inference on the part of the researchers, and our ability to draw sound conclusions about the relationships between the quotations returned by the queries would have been limited. Thus, to move from these smaller snapshots to contextualized vignettes or complete conversations, we decided to restore the surrounding text. Using the results of the coding queries, we went back to the raw transcripts and gathered the surrounding text, forming a reduced data set containing full discussions about emotion and the presence or absence of emotional communication. The text surrounding the above quote, for example, reveals a much fuller story. Parenthetical abbreviations (shown above) indicate the code; we queried data at the subcode level, and thus include no abbreviations for the broader codes. When only one code was applied, italics indicate the coded portion of the text. Text with two codes appears in bold italics, and text with three codes is also underlined:

Interviewer:

The question is, like, can you think of a time when an adult, maybe a teacher at school, it doesn't have to be, really, if you were like, "Wow, this person really knows me?" Because that's usually a good feeling. Was there a time that happened that you wanted to talk about?

Female 2:

(AoS-F) *Yes, my Spanish teacher, um, sometimes she would notice when I'm feeling down or happier, you know? I think there was this one time where I was just really upset because, um, socially I'm not doing well.* Academically I'm doing really good. Um.

Interviewer:

She noticed that?

Female 2:

(Dis) *She notices, because it's hard to notice from someone like me because I don't really like to talk about it, because I feel like if you share with someone it turns into another problem. I feel like if you're going to talk about something, or something private at least, talk to someone you don't really know. That way you don't have to worry about how they think about you and what's going to happen in the future.* (Dis, Sup-D) **But, as for my Spanish teacher, I told her my problems and stuff**

and she really said that she didn't expect that of me. Like she didn't know what was going on, just because she saw me, she thought I was just a good student in school and not worrying about anything at home and stuff. (Dis, Sup-D, Sup-S) <u>***Um, when I told her my problems, I felt like she knew me, because she told me I didn't have to worry about it, it's just something simple and small, and that tomorrow's just going to be a new day. And it's going to be okay.***</u> *That's why I felt like she knew me, because that's just how I am. Like, I get over stuff.*

Interviewer:

How is your relationship with her now?

Female 2:

It's the same, because, um, she knows that some people are judgmental too.

Interviewer:

So she took the time to find out what was going on?

Female 2:

Mm-hmm.

At this level, we re-coded raw data with three new codes:

Emotional expression (EmE)

Emotional suppression (EmS)

Emotion coaching (EmC)

To the above vignette, we applied both *emotion expression* and *emotion coaching* codes. In the following example from a different focus group, *emotion expression* and *emotion suppression* were each applied to the contextualized excerpt from the reduced data set to indicate a conversation in which youth discussed both concepts. Evidence for emotion expression (EE) is indicated by italics, while evidence for emotion suppression (ES) is in bold font. Application of the final codes is demonstrated to the left of the text.

Interviewer:

Public or private? Who wants to talk about this?

Male 4:

Because some things, I keep them inside, *and some of them I just tell them out. If there's this guy I don't like, I would just say, if he hangs around with me, I would tell him like that, dude, I don't like you.* **But the ones I keep inside are like—like for me it's embarrassing to like, tell that I like that girl over there, I don't know why. But that's like pretty much the only thing I keep inside, the love stuff and all that.** *But the rest, I just take it out. I tell everybody what I think.*

Interviewer:

Anybody else the same way or different?

Female 2:

I agree. I think it depends on how people's emotions are. Like how they react to what's like shown or given. *Like some people can get really emotional easily,* **or some people can just hide it and seek it out in something else.**

Interviewer:

Anybody else?

Female 1:

Feelings are private.

Interviewer:

Did you say feelings are private?

Female 1:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Like part of your private identity?

Female 1:

Yes, I don't really like showing my feelings. I'm usually just happy. **Or if I'm mad, I'm mad, but I don't like, I don't show it, like, when I'm mad, okay, but I'm usually happy. Like if I'm something else, like, I don't know, I just go think about it, or take it out on something else.** *But other than that, it's just like with everyone I like being happy.*