

Emotional Complexity, across cultures, groups and individuals

As a part of our studies of PreMenstrual Tension, we obtained emotion ratings from individual women for as many as 70 days in a row. These individual level ratings can be analyzed by either factor analysis or hierarchical cluster analysis to give a picture of the complexity of a woman's emotional life. We discovered in two separate samples that women differed substantially in how many factors were generated by their daily emotional ratings. For some women, as many as four factors were required, while for others a single factor was sufficient. Women whose emotion ratings were more complex were more likely to experience PMS, and were also more likely to have been affected by manipulations of the facial expressions. (Schnall, S., Abrahamson, A., Capron, C. & Laird, J.D. (1997) Self-perception and pre-menstrual tension. Presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, August, 1997)

Extending this idea, we have begun to examine how these differences among individuals relate to other features of emotional life. (Pelusi, M., & Laird, J. D. & Flack, W. F. Jr.(1997) Emotional complexity and emotional intelligence. Presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Society, Washington, D.C. May, 1997)

A related kind of research was reported by Shaver et al in the 1992 Review of Personality and Social Psychology. They used hierarchical cluster analysis to examine the structure of emotion word meanings in various cultures, and established that although the particulars of the emotion lexicon in different language groups varied substantially, a common superordinate structure could be found in all. Shaver et al examined the structure of word meanings, based on similarity judgements. In our research we have looked instead at the co-occurrence structures of actual emotional experiences. We find structures that are broadly similar, but which have some intriguing differences as well. For example, men and women generate somewhat different structures. We are now extending this research comparing groups within the U.S. and also in other countries and language groups. (DeGruchy, E., Pelusi, M. & Laird, J.D. (1998) The structure of emotional knowledge vs. The structure of emotional experience. Presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, February.)