Individual Differences in Emotional States

In the previous chapters, the issues of enduring emotional states, their developmental changes, and specific response measures were discussed. Scale construction and the internal properties of the scales were described. In this chapter, the results from the administration of the scales are discussed. Of particular interest are the individual differences in emotions observed when administering the scales.

Earlier we stated that emotional states are private acts of the individual and that one of the effects of socialization is to modify emotional expressions and states. Nevertheless, we believe that the best way to measure emotional states in infants and young children is through an expression-by-situation analysis. While recognizing the limitations inherent in any measurement system that purports to measure emotional states, we view our data as reflecting emotional states. Consequently, when we refer to emotions in our discussion, we are referring to emotional states as measured in an expression-by-situation analysis.

Three major issues pertain to the data gathered. The first concerns individual differences in specific emotional expressions and their relationship to age, gender, and social milieu. From a naive psychological point of view, it is believed that boys express more anger than girls, although both are probably equally happy. Children express more anger with age, as well as more competence. Fear and happiness are apparent from the early periods. Furthermore, children who have been in day care for long periods of time are likely to show more affiliation, and possibly more competence, than children newly enrolled in a day-care program. Statements such as these address individual differences in
the expression of specific emotions as a function of age, gender, and social milieu.

Information about individual differences per se may also serve to validate the scales by confirming results reported by other investigators. That is, do the results generated by the scales show any correspondence to findings generated by laboratory experiments using different procedures? The body of literature existing on children's fear and sociability and the available data on happiness, anger, and competence can be used to help validate the scales.

The second issue concerns the relationships among different emotional expressions. That is, are there naturally covarying aspects of emotional behavior among individuals, aspects that vary as a function of age or gender? Are angry children also fearful children? In everyday experience, certain emotions are often thought of as somehow going together: angry people are not likely to be happy, and competent people are generally not afraid. The analyses reported in this chapter are designed in part to examine whether there are natural groupings of emotions.

The third issue in the analysis of individual differences again focuses on the relationships among the five emotions. The specific question concerns the configurations of emotions and their relationship to personality. The relationship between enduring emotions and personality was discussed in Chapter 2. There, a case was made that configurations of enduring emotions may be similar to "personality structures." Through the use of multivariate techniques, different patterns of emotions were generated from the data collected on the scales. These profiles of enduring emotions provide information about possible personality types (i.e., possible configurations of enduring emotions) as well as about the individuals that fit such types. If the measurement instrument is successful in measuring individual differences, this success must depend not only on its ability to assess an individual child on the expression of specific emotions but, more important, on its ability to classify individual children in terms of profiles of emotional expressions. The clinical application of the scales is further discussed in Chapter 12. These profiles are of particular importance inasmuch as they allow one to look at more than individual differences in the expressions of single emotions and to examine the broader issue of differences in patterns of emotions. This chapter, then, is a discussion of the empirical study of individual differences in emotional expressions through the use of the Scales of Socioemotional Development to measure emotional states.