



An Issue with a Study of Emotions

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Editorial

In her 1971 study, Helen Lewis, a psychologist and a psychoanalyst, began with a systematic verbal content analysis for detecting emotion in talk [1,2]. She applied it to 150 recordings of psychotherapy sessions by 7 different therapists. She did not include recordings of her own sessions as a psychoanalyst.

Lewis is thought to have found that wording indicative of shame occurred much more frequently than for any other emotion, but was also by far the least mentioned of the emotions by the patient and or therapist. According to her comments, the content analysis found many mentions of pride, love, grief, anger, fear and guilt in the sessions, but very few on shames. Her comments about her findings of avoidance by both patient and therapist strongly support the idea that shame is taboo in modern societies [3,4]. However, so far as I can tell, there is a problem that this note will try to clarify: in the book and her subsequent publications she did not include the information that would make use of the systematic nature of the content analysis program that she used.

Because I think that her work doesn't hold its rightful place in the growing literature on shame, I decided to reread her 1971 book in order to present it to the scholarly audience. Surely, they would be impressed by a systematic study of emotions so long ago, since even today there are still very few systematic studies that also have such powerful implications for everyday life.

But I was shocked to find in my rereading of her book that it didn't disclose the numerical findings from her content analysis. Nor did any of her subsequent books or articles. So why did I think that she found that shame was the most frequent but least mentioned of the emotions the content analysis disclosed, as indicated above? The answer to that question requires a discussion of meetings with her.

I first met Helen in 1981. My wife [5,6] and I were so impressed by her 1971 book that we arranged to fly from California to her hometown on the East Coast. Our meeting was mostly given over to her book and ideas about shame. We were so encouraged by the meeting that we made two more visits after the first until her death in 1987.

One of the most frequent subjects of our discussions was the findings from the content analysis study of words used by patients and therapists in the psychotherapy sessions. She repeated to me in different conversations the basic findings, particularly the central role played by what she called "unacknowledged (hidden) and bypassed (unconscious) shame" in the sessions. But she didn't tell me the actual numbers for shame and for the other emotions that the test disclosed. And unfortunately I didn't realize I should ask for them directly.

The reason that I am concerned with this issue at this time is my idea that by not revealing the actual numbers, she lost the possibility of a very large new audience that would have appreciated a quite broad study of emotion based on systematic data. That is, she could have presented to the scientific side of emotion researchers and to the public a rare kind of study of emotions, a scientific one that was also enriched by her extensive, close, detailed and meaningful comment.

When this idea occurred to me recently, I began to search all of Lewis's work for the numerical findings of her content analysis. Not finding them there, I contacted the Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Akron, where Lewis's daughter, Judith Herman, told me Lewis had bequeathed her notes. But they were unwilling to forward copies to me.

I tried to search Gottschalk's, and also Gleser's and Winget's writings. Gleser and Winget didn't yet reveal the numbers I am still searching for, and Gottschalk's publications are so numerous that I am still looking for a way of searching all of them.

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Conclusion

I have outlined why I think the raw data from Lewis's content analysis in the study described in her 1971 book is important. What is needed are the numbers for each of the 9 emotions measured by the Gottschalk-Gleser content analysis that Lewis used, a short paragraph.

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