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Changing Moods and Influencing People

The use and effects of emotional influence behaviours at HMP Grendon

Karen Niven is a Ph.D. student, and *Peter Totterdell* and *David Holman* are senior researchers. All are based at the Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield.

This paper concerns a research study conducted at HMP Grendon examining the behaviours used by staff members and prisoners to influence each others' moods, referred to as emotional influence strategies. The use of emotional influence has been reported in other contexts (e.g., hospitals, support groups), and may have important outcomes including well-being and relationship qualities. This research provides the first investigation of emotional influence in a prison context, and regards the occurrence and effects of a set of specific emotional influence strategies. The current paper introduces the concept of emotional influence and highlights its relevance to the prison environment. The study is then briefly outlined, and some key findings are detailed. Potential implications of emotional influence in prisons such as HMP Grendon are outlined, in terms of interpersonal stressors, mutual caregiving, and building and maintaining positive working and therapeutic relationships. Future directions in terms of research and practical interventions are also discussed.

Emotional influence

When someone we work or live with feels down, a common response is to try to make them feel better, for example by making them a cup of tea or praising them. Likewise, there are times when we wish to make someone feel worse, for example by shouting at them or giving them the 'cold shoulder'. These behaviours can be viewed as examples of emotional influence strategies. Emotional influence simply refers to any deliberate attempt to regulate or manage the emotions or moods of another person. A previous study by the authors suggested that individuals use almost 400 distinct behaviours in order to influence others' feelings (Niven, Totterdell and Holman, 2007). Some of the most common behaviours reported can be seen in Table 1.

There are several reasons why individuals might choose to use such behaviours to influence others' feelings. Some of these reasons regard helping others. For example, the literature on caregiving suggests that individuals may use emotional influence to help those around them to cope with stressors (e.g., Kahn, 1993). In addition, the literature on support groups suggests that emotional influence may be used for therapeutic purposes, to help members minimise and deal with negative emotions (e.g., Francis, 1997). Conversely, emotional influence may be used instrumentally. For example, studies have highlighted the role of emotional influence behaviours including aggression in bullying, a pattern of behaviour typically concerned with trying to boost one's own self-esteem (e.g., Sutton, Smith and Swettenham, 1999). Likewise, individuals may deliberately try to induce negative emotions in others, for example making others feel guilty or anxious, for personal gain (e.g., Vangelisti, Daly and Rudnick, 1991).

One of the main reasons that researchers have showed interest in emotional influence is the potential implications this process might have. In particular, the use of emotional influence to help others within an organisation could positively impact on organisational members' well-being, and promote positive relationships between colleagues. In contrast, the use of emotional influence for instrumental reasons within an organisation could result in negative well-being, and

Table 1. Examples of emotional influence behaviours		
Strategy type	Positive emotional influence behaviour	Negative emotional influence behaviour
Ingratiation	Complimenting	Criticising
Social support	Listening	Ignoring
Humour	Joking	Mocking
Logic	Pointing out upsides of a situation	Pointing out downsides of a situation
Force	Using soothing tones or words	Using aggressive tones or words

relationships between organisational members characterised by distrust and a lack of respect, aside from short-term personal gains. There has been some research that supports these assertions. For example, Kahn's research suggests that a lack of caregiving in an organisation can result in emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and less personal accomplishment amongst employees (Kahn, 1993; 1998). In addition, researchers have also highlighted associations between the ratio of positive to negative interpersonal behaviours in organisations and teams and the quality of relationships between members (Losada, 1999; Losada and Heaphy, 2004), with a higher ratio of positive to negative behaviours being associated with higher quality relationships. However, there has not been any previous research regarding the effects of specific emotional influence behaviours.

Emotional influence in prisons

Researchers have examined emotional influence in a variety of organisations including hospitals and care-homes (Francis, 1994; Francis, Monahan and Berger, 1999; Locke, 1996), social work agencies (Kahn, 1993; 1998), and legal firms (Lively, 2000; Pierce, 1999). However, until now, researchers have not examined emotional influence within prisons. There are three main reasons why the study of emotional influence could be considered to be particularly relevant to the prison environment. Firstly, there may be a high occurrence of emotional influence in such settings. The detention of individuals for punitive reasons fosters emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration, regret and resentment (Crawley, 2004; Greer, 2002). Individuals may be dangerous and unpredictable, producing fear and anxiety amongst both inmates and staff members (Crawley, 2004). Furthermore, the close proximity and high levels of interactions inherent on prison wings draws staff members and inmates into emotional engagements (Crawley, 2004; Greer, 2002). Collectively, these factors suggest that individuals in prisons are likely to perform a lot of management and control of their own and others' emotions.

Secondly, emotional influence may be very different in a prison compared to other settings in which it has been studied previously. In particular,

inmates' history of exposure to and participation in crime culture might shape their motivations and methods for using emotional influence, and also their reactions to others' use of such strategies.

Thirdly, the potential effects of emotional influence, as discussed above, may have extra resonance in the prison environment. Both staff members and prisoners have reported high levels of strain and poor well-being in past research (e.g., Koo and Kim, 2006), and prisoners have often complained of a lack of respect (e.g., Edgar, O'Donnell and Martin, 2003). In addition, relationship qualities including trust and respect have been cited as especially relevant in terms of inmate and staff functioning in prison environments (Liebling and Arnold, 2005). As such, investigating the use of emotional influence in prisons might help to highlight some potential points of intervention to target such outcomes.

As a therapeutic prison, emotional influence may be especially important at HMP Grendon, which is one of only a handful of prisons in the UK where therapy plays a central role in the day-to-day lives of its staff and inmates. Grendon's six prison wings are each viewed as therapeutic communities, within which prisoners attend daily group therapy sessions facilitated by wing staff members. Relationships between prisoners and staff members have been seen as central to therapeutic efficacy in both prison environments (e.g., Genders and Player, 1995; Parker, 2003) and general therapeutic settings (e.g., Johnson and Talitman, 1997; Macran, Stiles and Smith, 1999). Moreover, the actual therapy offered at HMP Grendon has several parallels with the concept of emotional influence, since it concerns issues such as confronting one's own and others' emotions, and aims to increase individuals' understanding of the effects of their behaviours and words on others (Trediget, 2001).

The research

The current study explored the use of emotional influence behaviours amongst staff members and prisoners from three prison wings at HMP Grendon. These wings are referred to throughout this paper as Wing 1, Wing 2 and Wing 3, to protect participants' anonymity. The researchers were interested in

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understanding which types of emotional influence behaviours were used, by whom, and in which contexts. The quality of relationships, moods and well-being within these three wings were also examined, to give the researchers some insight into potential implications of emotional influence.

In order to investigate these issues, the research team designed diaries (e.g., Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli, 2003) to be completed by participants over a two-week period. Participants were instructed to complete a diary entry once a day, concerning an event during the day where either they had deliberately tried to influence someone else's feelings using one of the behaviours listed in Table 1, or they believed that someone else had deliberately tried to influence their own feelings using one of these behaviours. The diary entries included a question regarding which emotional influence behaviour had been used, a series of questions concerning their mood states around this event, and questions about the context of the event (e.g., was it during therapy). In a separate questionnaire, participants were also asked to indicate personal information (e.g., age), and complete measures of their relationships and well-being. The diaries were completed by 21 participants across the three prison wings (N = 4, N = 9, N = 8, respectively). These included 7 staff members (2 males, 5 females) and 14 prisoners. The findings reported in this article concern the responses of these individuals only.

Key findings and interpretations

Use of emotional influence

Table 2 displays the numbers of events reported by participants over the two-week period. A total of 280 emotional influence events were reported by the 21 participants during the study — an average of 13 events per person. 75 per cent of these events concerned participants' own use of emotional influence, and just 25 per cent concerned other people using emotional influence toward the participants. This difference may reflect a lack of awareness regarding others' use of emotional influence towards oneself. It may also be indicative of a culture often present in prison environments that holds the reporting of others' actions or words — snitching — in low esteem (Hunt, Riegel, Morales and Waldorf, 1993).
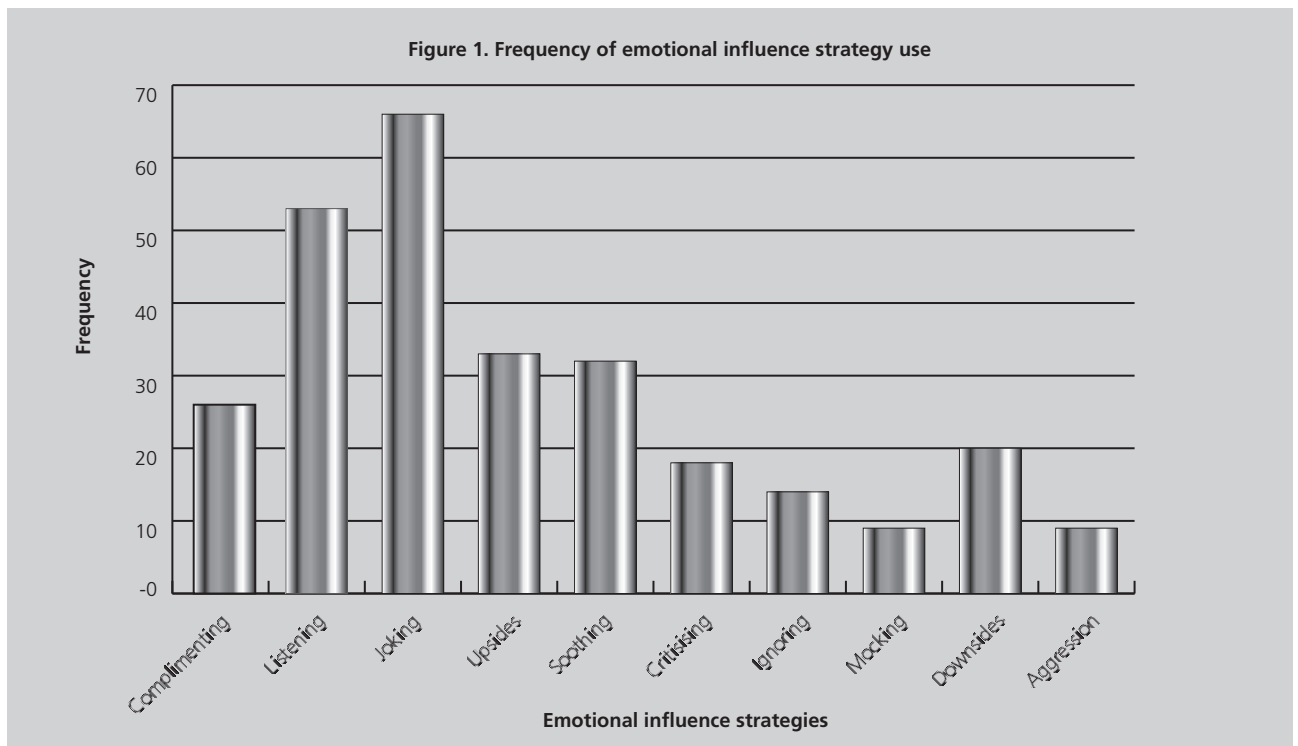
There were clearly more positive thank negative emotional influence behaviours reported during the study period, with 75 per cent of the events reported regarding the use of positive behaviours. The frequency of usage of the ten specific emotional influence behaviours examined is displayed in Figure 1. As can be seen, the most reported behaviour by participants was joking. This corroborates previous research highlighting the central role of humour in organisations where members are forced to deal with difficult issues. For example, researchers have reported a great deal of black humour in medical and social work settings, where employees and patients are faced with illness and death on a daily basis (Francis, 1994; Francis et al., 1999; Sullivan, 2000). Listening was also highly used within the prison, perhaps unsurprising given that the prison was therapeutic; listening is a key part of therapy (Burnard, 1999). Aggressive tones or words and mocking were the least reported strategies, suggesting that these behaviours were rarely used. Certainly, such behaviours are discouraged in therapeutic communities (De Leon, 2000).

Differences were found between staff members and prisoners regarding emotional influence. In terms of the types of emotional influence performed by participants, a higher proportion of the total emotional influence performed by staff members was positive (92 per cent) compared to the proportion of positive emotional influence performed by prisoners (63 per cent) (t = -3.04, p<0.01)[1]. The vast majority of staff

Table 2. Number of emotional influence events reported by different groups

	Number of events (average)	Number of events performed by particpant (average)	Number of events performed toward participant (average)
Overall	280 (13)	210 (10)	70 (3)
Staff members	118 (17)	99 (14)	19 (3)
Prisoners	165 (12)	113 (8)	51 (4)
In therapy	63 (3)	48 (2)	15 (1)
Out of therapy	207 (10)	154 (7)	53 (3)
Wing 1	19 (5)	11 (3)	8 (2)
Wing 2	167 (19)	134 (15)	33 (4)
Wing 3	97 (12)	67 (8)	29 (4)

1. All analyses conducted examined usage of specific emotional influence behaviours as a proportion of each individual's total number of emotional influence events reported.

Figure 1. Frequency of emotional influence strategy use

(Bar chart: y-axis labelled "Frequency" ranging from -0 to 70; x-axis labelled "Emotional influence strategies" with categories: Complimenting ≈27, Listening ≈53, Joking ≈67, Upsides ≈33, Soothing ≈32, Critisising ≈18, Ignoring ≈14, Mocking ≈9, Downsides ≈20, Aggression ≈9.)

members' emotional interactions therefore involved trying to make others feel better, suggesting they performed a great deal of caregiving, as has been found with employees in other professions including social work (Kahn, 1993; 1998). Staff members also reported listening to others more than prisoners (t = -3.39, p<0.01), consistent with their roles as facilitators of group therapy. In addition, prisoners reported criticising others (t = 2.43, p<0.05) and ignoring others (t = 2.76, p<0.05) more than staff members. It could be that these behaviours are seen as inappropriate for staff members, or that staff members have developed better social awareness and skills, and thus avoid such behaviours. In terms of the types of emotional influence received by participants, prisoners reported others pointing out the upsides (t = 2.00, p<0.1) and downsides (t = 2.06, p<0.1) of their situations more than did staff members. In fact, over the two-week period, not one staff member reported a single incident where someone else used either of these two behaviours toward them. The prevalence of these strategies towards inmates is not surprising, given how central this sort of challenge is to the therapeutic process. In addition, it may be that participants (particularly prisoners) may not have felt it appropriate to use these strategies towards staff members, since they involve looking at a situation in a different way, and therefore challenging someone's current way of thinking.

Most emotional influence occurred outside of therapy (t = 3.21, p<0.01). In fact 76 per cent of the total events reported occurred outside therapy, which may simply be due to the amount of time spent in and out of therapy on the wings. With regards to the types of emotional influence performed and received, both prisoners (t = 2.92, p<0.01) and staff members (t = 3.09, p<0.05) reported using less joking during therapy, and prisoners also reported using less mocking (t = 1.84, p<0.1) and receiving less joking (t = 3.96, p<0.01) during therapy. These findings are intuitive, as humour — whether positive or negative — would not be appropriate within the therapeutic context. Prisoners also used less ignoring (t = 2.37, p<0.05) during therapy, and both prisoners (t = -2.48, p<0.05) and staff members (t = -7.40, p<0.01) received more listening, suggesting a key role for giving rather than withholding social support during therapy.

Emotional influence, feelings and relationships

On average, participants in the study trusted 27 per cent of others who were involved in the research project in their wing (eight people), and respected 33 per cent (10 people)[2]. Both staff members and inmates experienced higher levels of strain than those reported within other occupational groups, including managers and doctors (Mullarkey, Wall, Warr, Clegg and Stride, 1999). The relatively high strain amongst the participants in this study concurs with previous findings about high strain amongst prison staff members and inmates (e.g., Koo and Kim, 2006). One possible contributor towards this strain might be the use of negative emotional influence in this setting. Regression analyses controlling for differences between participants suggested that the use of negative strategies towards others (compared to using positive strategies or no influence strategies at all) increased participants' levels of misery (β = 0.11, p<0.05), and decreased their levels of hope (β = -0.09, p<0.05) and

calmness (β = -0.09, p<0.05). In addition, when participants had negative strategies used toward them, this increased their levels of misery (β = 0.29, p<0.01), anger (β = 0.38, p<0.01) and fear (β = 0.17, p<0.05), and decreased their levels of pride (β = -0.11, p<0.05), hope (β = -0.20, p<0.01) and calmness (β = -0.34, p<0.01). It could be the case that more negative emotional influence is used in prisons compared to other occupational groups, and thus plays a role in the higher levels of strain. Alternatively, it might be that negative strategies take on greater significance when used in this type of context. For example, being shouted at by a prisoner could have a more negative impact on a person's strain than being shouted at by a subordinate or a patient.

However, although the use of negative strategies was found to impact negatively on participants' feeling states, this type of emotional influence accounted for just 25 per cent of the total emotional influence reported. Moreover, despite the relatively high levels of strain amongst participants, when looking at other indicators of participants' feelings, a different picture emerged. On average, participants experienced low levels of misery, anger and fear, high levels of calmness, and medium levels of hope, pride, positive affect and negative affect. These results are not consistent with previous studies reporting poor well-being (as well as high strain) amongst those who work and live in prisons (e.g., Koo and Kim, 2006). The difference with the current prison may regard its therapeutic nature — perhaps such an environment produces less tension. It may also be that the high levels of positive emotional influence reported overall in the prison (see above) helped to alleviate some of the negative feelings normally experienced by those in prison environments. This is supported by regression analyses suggesting that the use of positive emotional influence improved participants' feeling states. In particular, the use of positive emotional influence strategies towards others (compared to using negative strategies or no influence strategies at all) decreased participants' levels of anger (β = -0.18, p<0.01) and fear (β = -0.14, p<0.01), and increased their levels of pride (β = 0.17, p<0.01), hope (β = 0.11,

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p<0.01) and calmness (β = 0.10, p<0.05). The use of positive strategies by others also decreased participants' levels of anger (β = -0.15, p<0.05) and increased their levels of pride (β = 0.14, p<0.01). It is possible that without the use of such positive behaviours, the levels of strain found in this context might have been even higher.

There were some differences found between staff members and prisoners in terms of their feelings and relationships. In particular, prisoners had higher levels of anger (t = 2.13, p<0.05) and fear (t = 2.34, p<0.05) compared with staff members. These differences could be the result of prisoners being detained and experiencing a lack of power (e.g., Crawley, 2004). However, they may also in part be related to the differential use of emotional influence — prisoners used more criticising and ignoring than did staff members — since the regression analyses detailed above suggested that using negative emotional influence worsened individuals' feelings. Staff members also had more people who trusted them compared to inmates (t = -3.49, p<0.01). Here, it may be that staff members' higher use of positive emotional influence helps foster trust towards them. Indeed, this assertion is supported by research regarding the impact of the ratio of positive to negative interpersonal behaviours on relationship qualities (Losada, 1999; Losada and Heaphy, 2004).

There were also differences observed between the three wings in terms of feelings and relationships. Wing 1 had a much lower level of hope than the other wings (F = 11.90, p<0.01), and also had lower levels of pride and calmness, although these latter differences were not significant. Participants from Wing 1 also had fewer people who reported respecting them (F = 3.55, p<0.05) than participants from the other wings. These poorer levels of mood and low quality relationships may be the result of current issues on the wing. However, they could also stem from differences in the types of emotional influence used on this wing. Analyses suggested that participants on this wing reported using more aggressive tones or words (F = 2.82, p<0.1) compared to the other wings, and also suggested negative effects of using negative behaviours towards

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2. More people were involved in the overall research project than just the 21 individuals who participated in the study reported in this paper.

others (see above). Additionally, participants from Wing 3 reported trusting (F = 4.33, p<0.05) and respecting (F = 4.26, p<0.05) more members of their wings. In fact, participants from Wing 3 reported trusting over 40 per cent of others on their wing, and respecting over 50 per cent. The main emotional influence difference between this wing and the others was that participants in Wing 3 reported using more criticising (F = 6.59, p<0.01) than those in the other wings. It may therefore be that the criticism reported in Wing 3 may have been viewed by participants as honest appraisal, and may have allowed participants to confront issues with others, resulting in higher levels of trust and respect.

Implications

The findings discussed above have two main implications regarding emotional influence in prison, and especially therapeutic prison, settings. Firstly, emotional influence may impact on individuals' feelings and well-being in prisons. When negative strategies were used in HMP Grendon, whether for personal gains in terms of self-esteem or for other reasons, this seemed to be accompanied by poorer moods. This suggests that negative emotional influence may act as an interpersonal stressor in prison settings. Conversely, the findings also suggest that positive emotional influence could be used to reduce negative feelings and improve well-being in prisons. In this respect, positive emotional influence could be seen as a method of caregiving, a way of helping oneself and others to cope with the high levels of strain often evident in this kind of environment. The implications regarding feelings and well-being are especially important given the high levels of strain often reported in prisons (e.g., Koo and Kim, 2006).

Secondly, the findings imply that emotional influence may impact on individuals' relationships with others in prisons. At HMP Grendon, when certain negative emotional influence behaviours were used, this corresponded to the occurrence of lower quality relationships. It could therefore be that the low levels of respect and trust often reported in prisons (e.g., Edgar et al., 2003) may at least partly be the result of negative emotional influence. In contrast, the study suggests that positive emotional influence may have a role in terms of building and maintaining positive working and therapeutic relationships in prisons. Interestingly,

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criticism, classified here as a negative behaviour, was also highlighted as having potentially positive effects in terms of relationship qualities in the prison. The implications concerning relationships are particularly critical given the relevance of trust and respect in terms of therapeutic efficacy (Genders and Player, 1995; Parker, 2003) and general inmate and staff functioning (Liebling and Arnold, 2005) in prisons.

Future directions and conclusions

The data presented here is part of a larger research project regarding the use and effects of emotional influence at HMP Grendon, and further investigations will be conducted to elucidate the effects of emotional influence on well-being and the quality of relationships within both wings and staff teams at the prison. Conditions under which the effects of emotional influence vary will also be investigated. For example, the authors hope to identify individual characteristics that make prisoners and staff members more effective emotion influencers and more susceptible to emotional influence.

Outside the realm of the current project, future directions for research might include a more detailed examination of the different types of emotional influence used specifically during different therapy sessions. Data regarding emotional influence strategies and the corresponding effectiveness of therapy could be collected to develop a characteristic profile of emotional influence behaviours used during effective therapy sessions, with a view to improving therapeutic interactions.

A final direction for future research regards the design and implementation of practical interventions, based on emotional influence strategy use. Informed by the results derived from the current project, interventions could be designed to train prison staff and inmates to proactively use or avoid specific emotional influence behaviours, in order to achieve some of the positive implications of emotional influence discussed above (e.g., building high quality relationships). Such an approach has been used successfully before in a study regarding the training of teachers to use specific strategies to influence their own emotions (Totterdell and Parkinson, 1999), and may also be fruitful in this context.

The current paper reported some key findings from a research study conducted at HMP Grendon, regarding events where individuals from the prison had deliberately tried to influence the ways that others felt. The results of the study suggested that emotional influence is prevalent in prison environments, and that most emotional influence in this setting is performed with the aim of improving others' affect, using strategies such as joking with or listening to others. Links were drawn between the reported use of emotional influence, feelings and relationships, suggesting implications in terms of stress, coping, and relationship qualities. The findings indicated that emotional influence may be an integral part of everyday prison life, particularly although not exclusively for those individuals in therapeutic prisons. Accordingly, individuals' emotional influence strategy use may prove a useful point of intervention to improve well-being and the quality of relationships in prisons.

A full list of references is availabvle from the author