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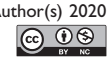
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Keeping violent offender rehabilitation on track: How the diffusion and redirecting of attentional focus/mood work in the GRIP program

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Abstract

There is an urgent need to understand how programming inside prisons can facilitate rehabilitation and reentry processes, especially among men convicted of violent offenses. GRIP (Guiding Rage into Power) is a year-long "Offender Accountability" program presently spreading through the California prison system. GRIP is a group-therapy and trauma-healing program that follows a somatic-awareness-centered model. We use audiovisual data to investigate the sequenced, second-to-second inner workings of what actually constitutes operational excellence in this evidence-based in-prison rehabilitation program. Making use of interaction ritual theory and conversation analysis, we demonstrate how two processes—the diffusion and the redirecting of attentional focus/mood—transpire in GRIP classrooms. The conclusion argues that these two processes may be the "hidden" building blocks, or what is lacking, in countless rehabilitation programs and other social work interventions—both inside and outside of correctional facilities.

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Prison rehabilitation, group therapy, trauma treatment, audiovisual data, interaction rituals, conversational analysis, GRIP

Introduction

The vast majority of incarcerated people in the United States are serving time in state prisons, and over half of these human beings have been convicted of violent offenses (Hinds et al., 2018; Pettus-Davis and Epperson, 2015). There is, therefore, an urgent need to understand how programming inside prisons can contribute to successful rehabilitation of people convicted of violent offenses. Making use of audiovisual (AV) data, which have been undervalued in social work research (Scarnato, 2019), it is the issue that is taken up in the coming pages.

Let us begin with the enigma of successful interventions and the need for evidence-based programming (cf. Radatz and Wright, 2016). On one hand, it is well understood that group therapy sessions often derail even in less severe settings than prisons[1] (Clarke and Waring, 2018; Leszcz, 2004; Colijn et al., 2009; Szymczak, 2016; Yalom, 1995). Even outside of prisons, that is, a lot can go wrong. What is more, in California—at least according to a recent audit report (California State Auditor, 2018)—the majority of in-prison rehabilitation programs (including those based on cognitive-behavioral therapy) appear to be poorly administered and ineffective. Behind bars, that is, a lot does go wrong. On the other hand, quantitative research has demonstrated conclusively that a handful of in-prison rehabilitation programs actually do produce attitudinal or behavioral outcomes associated with rehabilitation (Cullen, 2012; Ezell and Cohen, 2012; Maruna, 2001). This brings us not only to an enigma, more generally, but also to the specific question taken on here—a question that can only be answered with systemic analyses of detailed qualitative data: how is operational excellence achieved, on the ground, in an evidence-based prison rehabilitation program?

Guiding Rage Into Power, or GRIP, as it is popularly known, is a rehabilitation program presently spreading through California's state prison system in part because evidence suggests that it actually works. A 2015/2016 longitudinal Lab-in-the-Field-Experiment demonstrated GRIP's positive and significant effect on prosocial attitudes (Maggioni et al., 2018).[2] According to managers of the GRIP Training Institute, of the nearly 200 GRIP graduates who have so far been released or received communion, only one has returned to prison (on a drug charge[3]). This amounts to a recidivism rate of 0.6%.[4] Such evidence of GRIP's success contributed to GRIP receiving support from the California State legislature's "innovative programs fund" starting in 2016. Support from the state legislature helped this yearlong program go from serving 60 men in San Quentin state prison, in 2011, to serving 550 inmates across five California state prisons in 2018.[5]

The CDCR categorizes GRIP as an "Offender Accountability" program. It is offered by GRIP Training Institute, the California-based non-profit organization formerly known as Insight-out. In the terms preferred by managers of this non-governmental organization, GRIP is meant to help inmates (1) stop their violent behavior, (2) cultivate mindfulness, (3) develop emotional intelligence, and (4) understand victim impact. GRIP can perhaps be best described as a group-based trauma-treatment and life skills-teaching program that follows a somatic-awareness-centered model.[6] (For a qualitative investigation of GRIP informed by "late" Foucault's pragmatic recovery of body-based self-disciplining practices and regimes, see Paulle, 2017).

GRIP emerged out of forerunners associated with its founder's roughly 15 years of work with thousands of prisoners in California's San Quentin State Prison. From the start, the vast majority of GRIP students have always been violent offenders. Each cohort of GRIP students is said to form a "tribe" consisting of approximately 30 men. Gang members are welcomed into each GRIP tribe, and managers of the program aim for balance across differently ethno-racialized populations. Each tribe is meant to operate like a replacement gang (if not family). As is the case in gang life, GRIP's tribal relationships are meant to be intense. GRIP explicitly uses gang symbolism. For example, the name of each GRIP tribe is based on the total number of years members have been incarcerated (e.g. "648" or "841"). This is reminiscent of how gangs deploy turf-referencing area codes. As the GRIP course manual makes clear, in the wake of (childhood) trauma, GRIP attempts to turn gang-related cultural references upside down—i.e. into healing rather than ultimately self-destructive processes. Most of the time, in class, is spent with the men seated (nearly) knee-to-knee in one large circle. Lead (non-inmate) facilitators guide the men through a 230-page course curriculum and accompanying activities. Within most tribes, three to five inmates serve as GRIP Trainee Facilitators (GTF's). These men function as interns, role models, and mentors (who, for example, offer testimonials early on and intermittently facilitate break-out sessions with "their" own six to eight inmates throughout the year). GTF's are carefully selected prisoners who, for the most part, have graduated from previous GRIP program series and who are willing to commit to an ongoing facilitator training. Upon their release, several former GTF's have become lead GRIP facilitators.

As Schore and Schore (2008) argue in "Modern attachment theory: The central role of affect regulation in development and treatment," therapy is not the "talking" but the "communication" cure. A key insight here is that non-verbal communication cues are vital to establishing therapeutic healing attachments. Here, we find both reasons why programs such as GRIP deserve our attention and why it might be beneficial to examine specific micro-interactional phenomena associated with such programs through the "lens" of AV data.

Recent developments in interview-based research on social work suggest more warrants for close-up accounts. One relevant example is Stige et al.'s (2019) paper based on the distinction between "personal" and "clinical" recovery. Clinical

recovery, the authors note, is led by professionals and meant to generate outcomes that can be objectively measured by experts. Personal recovery, by contrast, emphasizes participants' practical senses of belonging and identity formation. Based on interviews with survivors who went through trauma-specific group therapy, a main finding is that the therapeutic group was experienced as something fundamentally intertwined with each client's sense of agency. That is, what participants experienced as (pre-trauma) strengths that could be durable enough to help them continue to recover after therapy were strongly tied, in interviews, to their experiences of group therapeutic interactions. Revealing and provocative as this finding is, the interviewees seemed to have little to say about the actual micro-mechanisms within face-to-face encounters that fostered lived senses of belonging and self-efficacy.

Another pertinent article is De Vito's (2019) examination of how street gangs generate sense of belonging capable of filling voids associated with intergenerational trauma. Former gang members report having a lack of consistency with their primary caregivers (often because of death, substance abuse, incarceration, or requirements associated with working multiple jobs). Against this backdrop, De Vito's interviewees report that gangs were considered replacement families. Given their histories of limited supervision from or secure attachment to primary caregivers, gangs providing solidarity, emotionally charged connections, and intensely focused attention were experienced as all but irresistible. De Vito also emphasizes that healing attachments can be formed, thanks to the efforts of mentors and counselors who consistently make positive contributions. Here again, revealing as the interview data and analyses are, they bring to light little about how—at the micro-interactional level—healing attachments (reminiscent of beneficial familial bonds) take root.

Finally, we want to highlight Kimmell and Gockel's (2018) paper focusing on body-oriented psychotherapy (BOP) as an emerging modality in social work practice. Kimmell and Gockel (2018: 8) argue convincingly that BOP helped therapists continuously gauge and adjust (interpretations of) therapeutic treatment in ways that helped clients engage evermore challenging material while further expanding their abilities to bond with and support one another. "[W]orking directly at the visceral level of affect and sensation," Kimmell and Gockel (2018: 15–16) note, "may leave clients particularly vulnerable to being impacted by the group process for good or for ill. The careful development of trusting relationships and skillful facilitation is critical to mining the potential benefits of BOP and avoiding possible iatrogenic effects."

Kimmell and Gockel's (2008) cautious and probing analyses of their interview data demonstrate the promise of therapeutic programs such as GRIP. As we shall see, the promise of such interventions is based on (collective) learning processes anchored in participants' lived-through somatic experiences (cf. Wacquant, 2005). However, in Kimmell and Gockel's article, the reader is once again left wondering about the mystery of body-based learning and group formation processes because it is based on that which can easily be put into words.

Relying on AV data, our examination of an entire year of everyday transactions inside GRIP classes reveals two micro-situational processes that lie at the heart of GRIP's success: *the diffusion and redirection of cognitive focus and emotional flows*. Especially given the trend in social work away from interventions characterized by anonymous and brief interactions and toward "relational work" aiming at deep solidarities and meaningful transformations (Paulle and Jindra, 2020), we think it is important to consider that these two processes may be key ingredients operating—or lacking—in countless interventions within and far outside prison walls.

The rest of this article will be organized as follows: we will begin with some pith remarks on theory and methods. We will then turn to micro-interactional interrogations of the GRIP program. Two empirical sub-sections ("Diffusion" and "Redirection") integrate three analyses based on transcriptions ("Conversations") and four based on fragments of AV data ("Clips"). The conclusion sums up our findings and argues for a greater reliance on AV data in qualitative research on social work.

Theory

To our knowledge, Randall Collins' theory of interaction rituals (IRs) has yet to be applied to group-therapy-based prison rehabilitation. Yet, for a number of reasons, Collins' IR theory is highly applicable to programs such as GRIP. At the heart of Collins' (2004: 47–101) synthesis of insights from late Durkheim, Goffman (and other symbolic interactionists), phenomenology and ethnomethodology, is his "entrainment" model. Bodily co-presence is the point of departure in this model. The idea here is that attunement more or less automatically arises when somewhat clearly bounded groups of people are assembled, such that they can—or must—take account of (if not rhythmically synchronize with) each other's motions and somatic states. The next ingredient involves not just the focus of attention on a singular object, but also, crucially, participants' awareness that they are not alone in focusing attention as they do. But the real spark, in Collins' model, is shared affect or mood. Here, one might speak of intersubjectivity getting charged up by, in Durkheim's famous phrase, "collective effervesce." Feeling what others feel when confronted with vivifying emotional stimuli, while being aware that others are also being "juiced up"—this, the micro-interactional basis not just of (rhythmically) intensified entrainment but also, Collins argues, of social and moral solidarities, of motivation, and of change. Captivating conversations, Collins (Ibid) argues, are perfect examples of how this works: "[A]s the interaction becomes more engrossing, participants get caught up in the rhythm and mood of the talk."

Specifically, with regard to things being derailed in prison therapeutic settings, Collins' work on unsuccessful IR's may be as relevant as his work on successful ones. IR theory implies that encounters characterized by low levels of shared emotion, mutual focus, and entrainment will, typically, be experienced as draining.

The theory suggests that they will not lead to meaningful participation, let alone to strong sensations of camaraderie or profound transformations.

Methods

In 2014–2015, an entire year of one GRIP class was filmed in San Quentin, the California state prison out of which the program emerged. The AV data reveal a group of 29 inmates facilitated by two lead (non-inmate) facilitators and five inmate (trainee) co-facilitators implementing the 44-week program. Classes were scheduled for one hour but often went longer, sometimes lasting up to three hours. These meetings have been filmed with two video cameras: one wide lens and one close-up lens. The audio has been recorded with multiple microphones—on the cameras, overhead, and wired onto the facilitators.[7]

Generally speaking, the steps leading up to our analysis of the AV data examined in this article are akin to those followed by Bezemer et al. (2011, see also Heath et al., 2010). While taking field notes on emerging themes and patterns, both authors and a research assistant viewed all the footage from the first three months (as well as, more sporadically, the remaining parts). Comparing notes on this footage, we spent many hours re-viewing specific fragments—at one point with Randall Collins and another colleague influenced by his work. This led initially to the isolation of data clips more or less clearly characterized by high intensity interactions. These were scrutinized in an effort to analyze encounters that might be said to dovetail, to varying degrees, with interactional ritual theory. Then, to further establish our core themes, we directed our attention to the instances that, from the vantage point of Collins's theory, might be deemed surprising. These were the clips characterized by (potential) derailment either due to highly energized—or to energy draining—social dynamics.

It might be useful to discuss this selection strategy in more detail. In our initial analyses, we identified six cases characterized by high intensity interactions in which incarcerated men offered extended monologues unambiguously displayed strong emotional support for the program. We took these relatively rare encounters as our points of departure due to the clear effects of cognitive and emotional entrainment. Such moments fit seamlessly into Collin's (2004) IR theory. In subsequent data clip viewing sessions, our team moved from such hyper-visible moments to 20 "less obvious" instances of *entrainment in action*. By this, we mean instances in which entrainment seemed to take hold without the intensity of charged-up communal experience. This helped us document how "diffusion" leads to subtle, and far more frequent, moments of entrainment.

Next, we turned to encounters that were starting to derail. At least from the perspectives of facilitators, there was clearly an acute need to "redirect" them. In 9 of the total 17 "redirection" cases we selected, energy was being drained out of the interaction by emotionally "crippling" topics and/or tones of speech. In the other eight cases of this type, by contrast, the interactions were in danger of going "off

the rails" due to highly energized yet—from the perspectives of facilitators—misguided transactions.

All selected cases have all been coded and analyzed using Jefferson's (2004) system for conversation analyses (Appendix 1). Jefferson's system provides an established scheme for coding behavior in conversations. This approach lends itself to the study of emotional dynamics through the analysis of pitch traces in audience responses and the flow of speech (Collins, 2004: 136; Ruusuvuori, 2013: 335). For instance, monotone voices, a weaker articulation, or a stumbling effect in pronunciation indicate disappointment or the loss of confidence. This article uses what has been referred to as a Jefferson system lite (Hepburn and Bolden, 2017; Potter and Hepburn, 2008) to represent the conversational dynamics observable on video while aiming to represent conversational rhythms and emotional intensities in voice and speech patterns. Additionally, picture stills have been added to illustrate the conversations in greater detail. Other than the founder of GRIP, who agreed to be identified, all individuals referred to in this article are presented under pseudonyms—and all the pictures have been modified with an Adobe Photoshop standard filter—to ensure the anonymity of those involved.

Diffusion

As mentioned above, GRIP almost always involves participants sitting in a circle. Short and tall, high status, and low status outside the class, the men literally see eye-to-eye because they are all seated next to each other in the same types of chairs. This does not mean that everyone is equal. For example, facilitators have well-defined leadership functions (cf. Leszcz, 2004), and while all speakers can become leading objects of attention, some do so far more frequently than others.

CLIP 1: Diffusion in the face of an emotionally charged testimonial

With this in mind, Figures 1 and 2 may help illuminate the subtleties of how diffusion contributes to the successful GRIP rituals. In the video fragment from which these figures come, Edward offers a testimonial to the emerging group. Edward is a GRIP graduate being trained to become an inmate facilitator. Edward had been asked by the lead facilitator to discuss with the group a meeting he recently had with one of the people victimized by his crime, namely his daughter. Everything he said and emoted supported the aims of the program. As such, one might expect that the testimony would come off as a "scripted" and that listeners might have "pulled the plug" on Edward's performance by not paying attention or refusing to share inthe emotional experience. This is not what happened.

Figure 1 shows Edward (E) in the middle with the light blue shirt. The contrasting postures, highly representative of the pattern that emerged during this

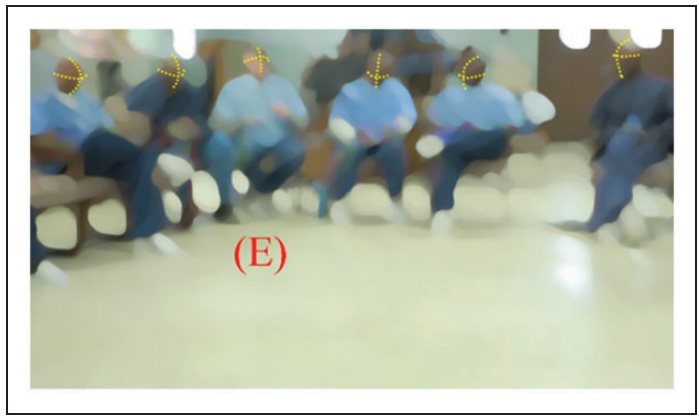

Figure 1. Receiving attention.

Figure 2. Giving attention.

interaction, indicate that while he held forth, Edward occupied the center of the attention space. Figure 1 shows a sub-group of five, with two participants on either side of the speaker. The postures of the four listeners (e.g. lowered heads) mimetically express the emotional tones narrated by Edward. The men in Figure 2 are deferential and/or paying close attention to Edward as he speaks. The solemnity of the listeners contributed to the ritual's ceremonial character. Their aligned orientations validate the speaker's credibility and indicate that the speaker and

the audience members were wrapped up in the same rhythmic feedback loop of emotional energy. The momentum of the shared experience empowered the speaker to dig deep into and communicate his emotions and thoughts in ways that felt profound.

With competing foci effectively squeezed out and emotions thoroughly entrained, it is as if the listeners were engaged in perfectly orchestrated background performances. For his part, Edward was learning how to occupy GRIP's center stage while diffusing apposite ideas and emotion. That is, while himself "juiced up" by virtue of being the focus of attention, Edward expressed emotions (regret, shame, gratitude, and hope) aligned with the formal goals of the course—e.g. tribe formation and what might be called post-traumatic personal growth (Linley and Joseph, 2004) supporting non-violence.

CLIP 2: Diffusion emerging out of a subdued conversation

Focusing too extensively on even the most compelling of any one individual's experience increases the risk that therapy sessions will become overly subjective rather than adequately intersubjective (Forsyth, 2018). As is usually the case in group therapy more generally (Yalom, 1995), GRIP encounters in which a single participant has an extended time to speak are limited. It is more typical that the focus of attention shifts between different participants engaged in dialogue. This brings up a common problem for group therapy facilitators: striking the right balance between talkative individuals and the needs of others who are less loquacious.

A characteristic GRIP exercise meant to foster awareness of bodily sensations can demonstrate the basic contours of how this played out. The low intensity encounter we selected to show this may seem to involve mainly a non-talkative and conspicuously diminutive student, Mark (M), and the principal facilitator, Jaden (J). Yet, *Conversation 1* reveals that another participant, the much larger and more muscular Seth (S), sitting next to Mark, ultimately exhibited such clear signs of entrainment that he might justifiably be considered a centrally important interactant. The rhythmic aspect of entrainment is emphasized in part because intersubjectivity and emotional attunement can be (further) intensified through even low-key synchronized gestures, postures, or movements. Perhaps because even seemingly mundane encounters in prison can lead to reprisals, and can therefore characterized by "imminent, obvious danger," even relatively low-intensity encounters can lead to "muscular bonding" and senses of "boundary loss" or the "submergence of self in the flow" (McNeill, 1997: 3, 8–10). Be this as it may, Seth appears initially to show little interest in the conversation between Mark and Jaden. His body is positioned away from Mark and he looks only at his notebook. Yet, even at the outset, Seth's on-and-of doodling indicate that he was attuned to what was going on between Mark and Jaden.

Conversation 1: Bodily awareness exercise (week 10 out of 44; duration: 1.16 minutes)

```
1  M:   Im tryinn to think of wat I wanna sa:y:-Im nervous right
2   now:  < Im [speechlhess.
3  J:              [Right. Right
4          ↑Don't try to think↑. ghjust see if you can touch with(.)
5          anything that is going-on with your body.
6  S:     ((doodling on paper))
7  M:      (.) <right now> in my bodyh. I- I- I jus feel. I feel
8          rel(h)a::xed. I feel c(h)a::lm.
9  S:    ((stops doodling))
10         (78.1)
11 M:      Thts about ah::ll really. >I jus feel nic< I fheel
12         rehlha:xed↑.=
13 J:     =uhhum
14 M:      Imnot shure whatelsto say:
15 S:                          ((Starts doodling))
16 M:                            yaknow-Im nervous
17 J:     uhhum <Where do you feel the nerves?↓
18 M:      ahh Be:cause Im noth really uhh[
19 J:                                  [No not why: where?
20 S:      ((Stops doodling))
21 M:       Pardn?
22 J:            Where?. hin the bhody?
23 M:       Im[ jus nervous all-over, bout SPheaking. Im not- Im not
24         much of a speakurr
25 S:        [((Starts doodling))
26 J:      No I donneed to know w(h)y, but where do you feel the
27         nervouhsness?
28 S:                ((Stops doodling))
29 M:       In my stomach<
30 J:      Ahh(.) What's happeninn in your stomach?
31 M:       Its [kindof ↑kn't tin up↑ right nowh ghhheh
32 S:          [((Starts doodling))
33 J:      Okay
34 M:       Annuh, my han:ds are getting 0a little ghrf0 a little
35         sweaty
36 S:           ((stops doodling))
37                       ((touches face)) ((moves))
38 J:      ↑Thats ghood↑. We'll take that
39 S:                                  ((Looks and nods))
40 J:      Thankyou
41 A:            ((both look in camera))
```

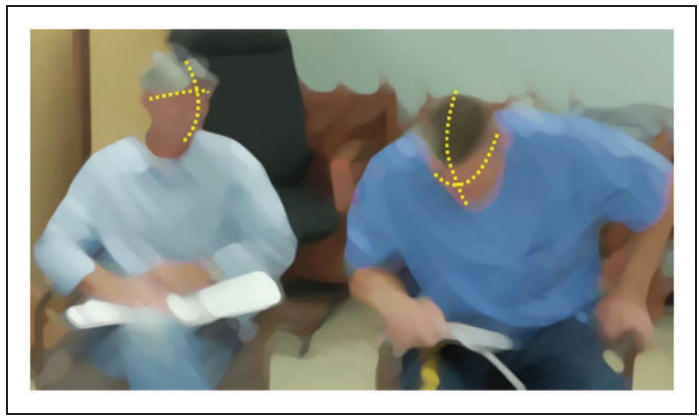

Figure 3. Discomfort.

The effects of being captured in the center of an attention space start to show when Mark becomes increasingly tense. Gradually, Mark's responses began to cohere with the facilitator's remarks and instructions. Starting with nervousness (line 1), Mark rather awkwardly refers to being relaxed and calm (lines 8 and 12) while silent for almost 8 seconds. After a quick nudge from the facilitator, Mark returns to his initial feeling of nervousness (line 16). He then reflects on speaking (line 23), his stomach knotting up (line 31) and sweaty hands (line 34). Experiencing these sensations during the interaction might seem specific to Mark. Yet whether due to an awareness of being especially close to the person at the center of the attention space or not, Seth shows far more signs of synchronicity with Mark than with the rest of the group. Toward the end of the conversation (line 37), Seth more explicitly signals physical entrainment: Mark mentions the sweatiness of his palms, and Seth lifts himself up in his chair to reposition himself, signaling a similar type of discomfort (Figure 3).

As if mutually released from overlapping distresses, during the end of the interaction (lines 30–33), both Mark and Seth responded positively to Jaden's upbeat comments. First, in agreeing with Jaden, Seth validated Mark's experience as shown in Figure 4. Then Seth's alignment with Mark is demonstrated when both men simultaneously look up at the camera in Figure 5. Whatever Mark and Seth signal to the rest of the group, it is undeniably done in unison. In other words, while the facilitator's comments were directed specifically at Mark, diffusion allowed effects of the interaction to carry over to the person sitting next

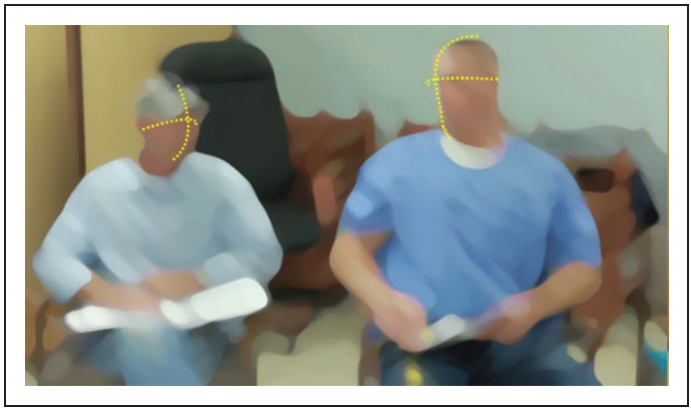

Figure 4. Nodding.

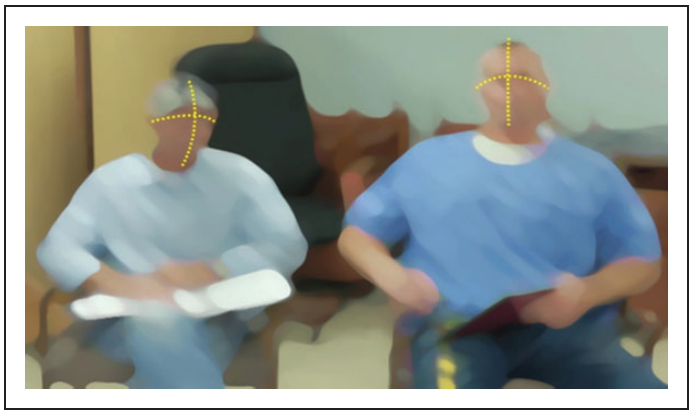

Figure 5. Looking at camera.

to the speaker. Obviously, the facilitator's injunctions to focus on bodily sensations steered the content of the discussion. Less obviously, perhaps, they created situational conditions in which diffusion could take place and entrainment could take hold.

Redirecting

As mentioned above, a lot can go wrong in prison rehabilitation programs. When therapy sessions start to flounder and drain emotional energy, facilitators often need to navigate between remaining sensitive to inmates' feelings, on the

one hand, and the need to redirect the cognitive focus and emotional flow on the other. Participants might feel alienated if they sense that their attempts to open up are left unrecognized or even ridiculed. Unskillful redirections can therefore negatively impact facilitators' attempt to develop legitimate authority and contribute to group solidarity (cf. Snijders, 2004). Moreover, inmates can respond unpredictably and disruptively to the formal aims of the program which, at times, stress boundaries between (inmate-)facilitators and inmates-participants.

Just as many of us say "OK" when we are trying to end telephone calls, facilitators often try to transition away from detrimental utterances (or monologues) with polite yet flaccid remarks on communication rather than content. For example, facilitators might offer an inmate a face-saving "well spoken" before trying to redirect and move on quickly. When emotional trauma is at the forefront, as the case below demonstrates, more subtle efforts at of micro-situational re-directing may be needed.

CLIP 3: A ritual falls flat and a gentle redirection ensues

In *Conversation 2*, below, the facilitator struggles to respond to a participant's pain even as what is being shared is clearly irrelevant to the matter at hand. The formal aim of the exercise was to discuss anger as a secondary emotion derived from more primordial (and harder to process) ones such as shame. As part of the assignment in class, participants used a flashcard and exchanged, in pairs, situations that caused them to experience anger. When they returned to the big circle format, facilitator Jaden (J) asked if anyone would like to share what they had discussed. Perhaps, simply misunderstanding the assignment, participant Fred (F) offered a somewhat muddled series of comments—seemingly unrelated to angry outbursts—focusing on sadness related to the death of his mother 24 years ago.

Conversation 2: Redirecting in the face of emotional trauma (week 3 out of 44; duration: 1.12 minutes)

1 F: A:n:d my son and I have a great relationship*h*
2 till t(h)is day (.) so::[
3 J: <b(h)ewe [THats quite a statement to make >you know<
4 on*a*day. whe:r your mot(h)er died twennyforryears ago
5 F: ↓yeh yeah↓ so by t(h)at happnnin I changed sometin' within myself<
7 J: m(h)m(h)
8 F: ANd it'urts:, >youknow<
9 its always at-a hurt becaus::. *th*oday iza °*ch*razy day°
10 So I'll< >Im sure I'll getta card< or two:: ann ten I'll talk to my
11 family mmembers: and letthemm know. go take sommflowers f(h)or me.
12 F: (11.6) ((Figure 6))

13 J: T*h*hank[you
14 F: [↓0*th*ank0 you↓
15 (24.1)
16 J: Anybuddyelse*h* u*hh*(.) particularly as'it pertains to >youknow< these
17 *th*ree things ((raises eyebrows twice))
18 F: ((Figure 7))
19 J: that you may not ↑feel↑ when youre in the middel of your angerr: but
20 that< (.)
21 you could become a*h*ware *hf*(h).
22 (1.2) ((signaling A))
23 A: I called my ex the ot*h*rday anu*hh* I was as*h*king about my daughterr<, an
24 she didnt answer.

Forced to deal with an off point yet heavy subject, Jaden avoids any kind of harsh response that might cripple the effectiveness of the group (Snijders, 2009). He comments only on the need to return to the curricular content. Jaden offers supportive remarks on a statement Fred made earlier (lines 3 and 4) and thanks him for his sharing in line 13 in between brief silences (lines 12 and 15). In this case, it seems, periods of silence allow things to fall flat and, therefore, expand opportunities to redirect the conversation and its emotional tone.

During one pivotal exchange, Fred seemed to look to the facilitator for an uplifting response (Figure 8 and line 12). Yet, the facilitator offered a mere "thank you" (line 13), which politely yet forcefully sucked the remaining rhythm out of the verbal exchange. Fred reacted with an awkwardly soft-spoken "thank you" in line 12. His posture was oriented inward (Figure 6 and line 18). His energy seemed to have been (further) drained by a failed transaction. Fred's posture in Figure 6 is in stark contrast with those of inmates emerging from or engaged in successful IRs (e.g. Mark's in Figure 4 and Edward's in Figure 1). When Jaden invited someone else to share, the first sentence offered by another participant (line 23) shows that the discussion once again began to cohere with the facilitator's aims.

Timing, tone, and non-verbal communication were vital to the facilitator's skillful redirection. The transition from Fred's final utterance back to the curriculum and the expectations of the group (line 14) started with a relatively long silence (2.4 seconds). Then (line 17), the facilitator heightened the vocal tone of "feel" and emphasized "anger." He also signaled the new direction and focus with facial expressions—i.e. he stopped speaking and raised his eyebrows twice, with the second raise slighter more emphasized than the first. During the silence depicted in line 20, the facilitator gestured to another participant Alfonse (A) and invited him to speak. Alfonse quickly picked up on this signal and began a response aligned with the curriculum. The gentle response to Fred, the pause, and the seamless transition based on verbalized and unspoken signals constitute the easily missed foundations of operational excellence on the ground.

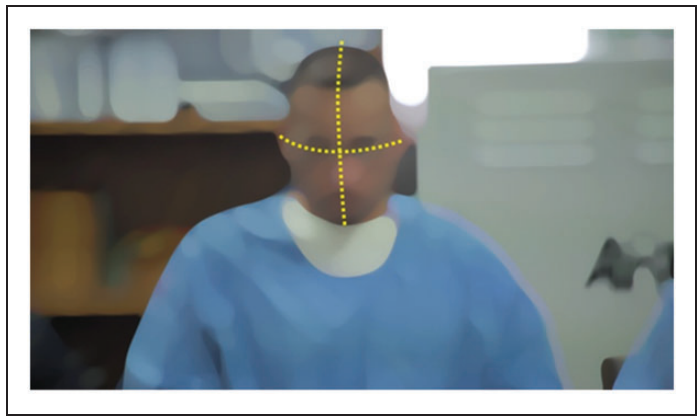

Figure 6. Turning inward.

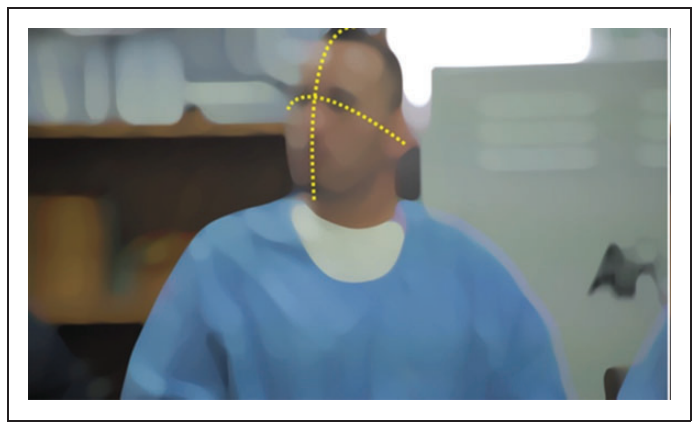

Figure 7. Anticipating response.

CLIP 4: A disruptive ritual redirected through matching emotional energy

As we have just seen, when faced with low energy speakers caught up in flat-lining distractions, facilitators can utilize silences to start transitions. However, revved-up participants can also gain control over the emotional tone of the group, and they can also direct attention away from the content of the curriculum. Keeping silent, in such cases, might serve only to grant more momentum to the (seemingly charismatic) participant charged up by being the object of attention. Certainly, in prison rehabilitation programs, such micro-interactions can derail an entire course.

Conversation 3 comes from a small group headed by an inmate GTF, Bob. In a small circle, the four students and Bob were supposed to be discussing what might be learned from situations involving (threats of) violent behavior. For example, the

curriculum stresses things speeding up, in such situations, and regret arising afterward if one does lash out. Diego (D) volunteers to go first. The group (G) including participants to his left (L) and right (R, R2) as well as facilitator Bob (B) actively respond. This exchange reveals Diego engrossing fellow participants in a narrative. Yet again, entrainment was accomplished in part through the incitement of rhythmic synchronization. This time, however, certainly from the facilitator's perspective, the train of thought and feeling was moving in a detrimental direction. As Diego spoke about conflict related to a non-vegetarian inmate whom he says was eating large amounts of vegetarian food—and as the other men in the small circle laughed supportively at what he recalled—Diego regularly made eye contact with his fellow students.

Conversation 3: Matching levels of emotion (week 9 out of 44; duration: 1.06 minutes)

1 D: So:: S(*h*)oo*th*- I ↑grabb'd-im up↑.
2 ↓I grabb'd-im↓ an I sock'd him a coupl-of times:
3 L: ((Rolls head))
4 D: a:n:d they kind of*h* broke it up bef*h*o:rre I could gett'im like
5 I wanted to: .
6 D: but*huhh*
7 R: ((Nod))
8 D: ((Looks)) Yeah thats<
9 G: Hahahahahu*h*hu*huh*
10 D: Cos I dont< you-know. I dont really b*h*other nobody*ih*
11 B: ↓Right↓
12 D: A:nn I dont like fo*h* people to take from somebody else
13 B: ↓Rig(*h*)t. exa*h*ctly↓
14 D: A:nn↑ I dunnow↑ it felt goo::d after too.
15 G: d*Hahh* hehehehe=
16 G: =hehehe
17 B: 0ou diddnt hav0-You didn't ha:v-a momen-of regret a*h*fterwa*h*rds.
18 D: NAa::*hhh*
19 G: Hahaheheha ((laughter))
20 B: *heh*Not-[Not even now?
21 D: [Not t(*h*)aT ti:mme. no
22 G: Hehehe
23 B: Wha- What about now?
24 D: N(*h*)o
25 G: Heheheh
26 B: *gh*ahh You feel *gH*eheh[*eh*
27 D: [Y*h*eah I do b'cau:se
28 >youknow< now Im learnin' differ*e*nt.
29 B: Right
30 D: So I should'ave re*h*acted a way:: bettr way.[
31 B: [>Isthere-a-bit-you-
32 could'ave-handled< [right

33 R2: ((face touch))
34 D: [Co:s' if I ad'hurt the doo:d anything I
35 could have go:t another case. anythhing
36 R: ((face touch))
37 R2: ((face touch))
38 B: ↓There you go. Right. Exactly.↓

Diego justifies his behavior by stating that while he is not normally violent (line 10), he was provoked by the immoral actions of the man he assaulted (line 12)—a viewpoint that the facilitator does not initially challenge (lines 11 and 13). Diego's original claim that he had no feelings of regret may have related to his opening statements about having had good reason to behave violently. Situational cues may also have contributed to his line of reasoning and performance utterly at odds with GRIP teachings. When Diego first talks about hitting the other person, the participant to his left (L) rolls his head (line 3), first throwing it backward in a circular motion, then looking down, and then making eye contact with Diego. This communicates recognition. Shortly thereafter, as depicted in lines 7–9, Diego responds to the nod of a participant to his right by looking at him and beginning an utterance that results in laughter before he finishes in line 8. Again here, the other students seem to be wrapped up in, and reinforcing, Diego's initial presentation of a reluctant vigilante self.

Bob's redirecting efforts began with his laugh (line 26). Crucially, his laugh matched the emotional tone of the entire group. Laughter is highly contagious (Provine, 1992), and the use of humor seldom takes place outside of (perceptions of) unequal power ratios (Kuipers, 2015). Intuiting this or not, Diego changed his tone immediately (line 27). Until Bob shook up the dynamic with his laugh, the mini-therapy group did not seem to recognize his ability to intervene. However, when Bob's intervention came, others in the group marked the transition—e.g. two members touch their faces consecutively (lines 36 and 37). The tide had turned.

The success of ritualized exchanges in such contexts is hugely dependent on the facilitator's ability to continually pick up on, and respond sufficiently to, myriad types of (potential) challenges. Not by showing emotional dominance that reaffirm formal boundaries but rather through subtle modes of micro-situational regulation and re-orientation. The implication is that facilitators need, at times, to match unconstructive emotional tones and synchronize with detrimental conversational rhythms in order to successfully communicate their authority before turning them around. One might speak here of bringing about therapeutic change initially through manipulation of natural flows of interaction (Clarke and Waring, 2018).

Conclusion

The central question guiding this article was the following: how is operational excellence actually achieved, on the ground, in an evidence-based prison rehabilitation program? In answering this question, audio-visual data and the tools of

conversation analysis have allowed us to dissect more and less subtle aspects of *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Collins, 2004)—and especially processes associated with cognitive and emotional "entrainment"—that are easily missed in interview-based and ethnographic accounts. We uncovered two potentially foundational micro-situational processes at the heart of GRIP's classroom dynamics: the diffusion and redirecting of cognitive attention and emotional mood. We have presented empirical data and analyses suggesting that these two processes may be difficult to observe building blocks of many effective in-prison rehabilitation programs as well as of countless other social work interventions.

We made our argument in two steps: first, we explored how mutual focus and emotional entrainment rely on what are often quite subtle forms of diffusion. We started with highly energized and clearly successful IRs and then sought out the "secret" inner workings of diffusion in less-charged situations. We demonstrated that none of the situationally immersed participants completely controlled nor even necessarily fully understood potentially crucial aspects of what went on, millisecond-by-millisecond and gesture-by-gesture, in the webs of interdependence they were continuously remaking. In other words, we showed how and why, through processes of diffusion, speakers and listeners came to be more interdependent than they might think. What is more, we demonstrated how well "hidden" diffusion-related forms of intersubjectivity undergird senses of membership in a GRIP tribe and, by extension, confidence in the possibility of personal transformation.

We also generated insights into cases in which interactional troubles led to efforts at creative in situ problem-solving. In our analyses of these cases, we found the shared mood of the group to be crucial in facilitators' readings of situational dynamics and especially in their artful redirecting of emotional dynamics. In the case of an interaction in which a participant appears to have misunderstood instructions, a lead facilitator used subtle hints and nudges to achieve a "gentle" redirection. Additionally, we documented a case in which a trainee inmate facilitator matched the emotional intensity of his small group of participants in an effort to regain control over (definitions of) the situation. Our findings suggest that a key to successfully dealing with inappropriately energized situations has to do with temporarily setting aside (or even showing contempt for) the formalized expectations associated with the curriculum while validating participants' lived experiences. Body-based and emotional synchronizing is what sets up pragmatic redirections of misguided encounters as well as what helps all involved regain footing on, from facilitators' perspectives, a more appropriate path. Our findings on such redirections underscore the importance not just of access to the right information—e.g. about incarcerated mens' situation-specific rationalizations of violence, possible ramifications of fighting, or the goals of the program—but also the need to have what it takes to calmly, confidently, and, at times, forcefully reorient emotional dynamics on the spot.

Certainly, a lot can and will go wrong in efforts to replace the often-destructive values and response patterns of incarcerated men convicted of violent offenses. Nevertheless, due in part to everyday diffusion and artful redirecting, frequently

recurring experiences within GRIP classes charge up primordial senses of brotherhood and confidence in possibilities of transformation.

Our main finding, then, is that diffusion and redirecting are two of the "hidden" processes keeping GRIP's version of violent offender rehabilitation on track. Our main claim is that AV materials such as those relied on in this article should play more central roles not just in future research efforts but also in the training of professionals engaged in (group therapeutic) relational work.

While our AV data have been helpful, they also come with drawbacks. Most importantly, AV data can suck one in too far. The people we studied were immersed in broader settings populated in part by incarcerated men with serious—and often (all but) untreated—mental health issues (Fazel and Danesh, 2002). We know that in a huge percentage of cases, these men come from socioeconomically depressed (and ethno-racially oppressed) backgrounds, that they were in many cases deeply traumatized as children, and that few of them have undergone any serious trauma treatment (cf. Roach, 2013). Furthermore, all of these victims turned victimizers find themselves thrust into broader settings notorious for ethno-racialized conflicts and the seeking of (violent) retribution in response to perceived affronts. In short, micro-interactions may not be "where the action is," in Goffman's famous phrase.

Despite these and other limitations, this article demonstrated why and how—in addition to other approaches such as modern attachment theory—conversation analysis and IR theory can help orient investigations into prison rehabilitation programs. More to the point, this paper shows why future studies might examine diffusion and redirecting processes. We have only just begun exploring the prospect that these two processes can undergird (1) the sense among trauma survivors that their at-once individual and group-related strengths may be powerful enough to help them continue on their paths to recovery (Stige et al., 2019); (2) the mobilization of trauma treatment strategies specific to those either in gangs or in settings plagued by gang cultures (De Vito, 2019); and (3) the effectiveness of somatically oriented trauma-treatment programs. In closing, we hope further research based on AV data will clarify the degree to which the two micro-interactional processes interrogated in this article amount to the secrets of success in both GRIP-like and non-GRIP-like group therapeutic settings.

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Notes

1. Based on a random sample of 6964 of inmates "housed at 12 male adult prisons operated by a single state" Wolff and Shi (2009: 58, 62) find that "approximately 21% of male inmates are physically assaulted during a 6-month period."
2. As Galeshi and Bolin (in press) point out, Maggioni et al. (2018) "explored whether participation in a prison offender accountability program impacted incarcerated individuals amount of trust. They found that trust significantly increased for those who had participated in the prison program compared to the control group. This finding provides support for the potential relationship between participation in correctional lifelong learning programs and increased trust among incarcerated individuals." As Balafoutas et al. (2020: 150) add, Maggioni et al.'s (2018) "findings indicate that participation in this ten-month long program increased trust . . . hence providing an example of a successful intervention in the direction of rehabilitation."
3. See: https://insight-out.org/index.php/109-featured/106-statement-from-founding-director (1 September 2019).
4. Insight-Out's claims are based on data to which the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has access. As such, officials at the CDCR would presumably invalidate these claims if they were deemed inaccurate.
5. GRIP's supporters, who claim to be convinced by the results they attribute to the program, include wardens such as the one from Avenal State Prison who recently advocated for GRIP in a journalistic piece. See: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/prisoners-unlearn-the-toxic-masculinity-that-led-to-their-incarceration_n_5d406b9ce4b06e9f169f1247?guccounter=1 (accessed 1 September 2019).
6. On GRIP's aims, as presented by the NGO operating it, see: https://insight-out.org/index.php/programs/grip-program (accessed 19 December 2019).
7. Before filming began, all the men participating in the recorded class signed release forms allowing the NGO operating GRIP to use the AV-material, for example, for training purposes, to generate interest in the program and for research purposes.

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Appendix 1.

Symbols used for Jefferson system lite

h	Breathy pronunciation	<u>underline</u>	stressing certain parts
(h	Short breath	>begin end<	faster pronunciation
:	Extended pronunciation	[	interruption
-	Fast follow up	↑$_{\text{begin end}}$↑	higher pitch
=	Continuous utterance	↓$_{\text{begin end}}$↓	lower pitch
	Break	0$_{\text{begin end}}$0	soft spoken
(.)	Short pause	*	signaling movement
(5.2)	Pause duration in microseconds		