Analyzing Speech Acts in Reddit Posts of Formerly Incarcerated Youths

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Abstract : This study explores the online discourse of justice-involved youth on Reddit, focusing on how anonymity and asynchronicity influence their ability to share and reflect on their incarceration experiences within the "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) community. The study utilizes a quantitative analysis of speech acts to examine the varied communication patterns exhibited by youths and commenters across two AMA threads. The results indicate that, although Reddit is not specifically designed for formerly incarcerated youths, its features provide a supportive environment for them to share their incarceration experiences with non-incarcerated individuals. The level of empathy and support from the audience varies based on the audience's perspectives on incarceration and related traumatic experiences. Additionally, the study identifies a reciprocal relationship where youths benefit from community support while offering insights into the juvenile justice system and helping the audience understand the experience of incarceration. The study also reveals cultural shocks in physical and digital environments that youth experience after release and when using social media platforms and the internet. The study has implications for juvenile justice personnel, policymakers, and researchers in the juvenile justice system.