

Negotiating shame: exchange and genre structure in youth justice conferencing

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In this paper we explore the interplay of exchange structure and genre structure in New South Wales (Australia) Youth Justice Conferences (YJC). These conferences are meetings of young offenders and their victims, in the presence of a mediator and support people, to determine the punishment for a crime. As part of this process mediators invite young offenders, who have already pleaded guilty to their offence, to recount their crime. This generally involves a number of interactive exchanges in which the mediator in a sense leads the offender towards a full recount and reflective evaluations on what has taken place. Interaction of this kind raises some interesting issues for the analysis of both exchange structure and genre structure. From the perspective of exchange structure, we have the problem of how to treat information seeking moves from an initiator who is leading the pair partner to a response of a particular kind (formally speaking, are these Dk1 or K2 moves, or something in between). From the perspective of genre structure, we have the problem of how to place these interactively constructed 'recounts' with elicited evaluation in the family of story genres, alongside monologic recounts and other forms of testimony and interrogation. The challenge is to work towards a model which captures the construal of restorative justice in this macro-genre, as part of the process of what Braithwaite has called 'reintegrative shaming'.