

0378

Institutionalized Adults with Intellectual Disability, Basic Human Rights, and the Problematization of Nonverbal Choice-making

Khalilah Johnson

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA

Objective: This study explores how opportunities to choose and participate in meal time occupations emerge for institutionalized adults with profound intellectual disability (ID). I describe how choice-making is acknowledged and problematized by staff. Additionally, I suggest Foucauldian *problematization* offers a lens through which to understand how meal plans passed down over time become embodied restrictive practices, and their impact basic human rights.

Methods: Institutional ethnography was utilized as the guiding social theory and methodology. Data were collected with seven adults with profound ID and eight staff members using participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis. Narrative coding and analysis were utilized to extract meal time narratives, contextualize, and give meaning to what transpired during exchanges between staff and residents.

Results: Analyses revealed that meal time exchanges were influenced by historical understandings of behavior as manipulative, systematic classifying of individuals with ID as infantile, and application of marginalizing practices that become standardized over time. Staff evaluated situations based on their histories with residents versus contextualizing the functions of residents' behaviors in the moment. Historical programs guiding meal time practices were carried over without reason or examination. The unintended result is an embodied practice of misinterpreting "choosing behaviors" as manipulation; eliminating choice becomes a tool of power to combat perceived manipulation.

Implications: These results have implications for the profession's conceptualizations of choice-making and agency, particularly as it pertains to client-centered interventions. Authentic client-centered practice ensures that clients' preferences are honored, even when they are not expressed in conventional or culturally symbolic ways.