

The background features a complex network of blue lines and arrows. Some lines are solid, while others are dashed. The arrows point in various directions, creating a sense of movement and interconnectedness. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on geometric patterns.

UB CAPABLE GIRLS:

A Capabilities Approach to the Sexual Rights & Resources of Young Women in Buffalo

Project Framework

- Philosopher Martha Nussbaum developed the **Capabilities Approach** as a way to pursue social justice.
- She argued that justice is not a matter of having “rights on paper,” but of ensuring that all individuals are equally able to actually access and exercise those rights (i.e., they are true **capabilities**).
- Using a Capabilities Approach means asking the general question:
What are people actually able to do and to be?
- The current project specifically asks:

What are girls in Buffalo actually able to do and to be when it comes to their sexual lives?

Project Objectives

Using the *Capabilities Approach* as a framework, our project aims to:

1. Examine the sexual rights and resources to which girls in Buffalo are technically entitled;

the policies and
services that exist
on paper

2. Assess the extent to which those rights and resources are actually accessible and to whom;

the policies and
services that girls see
on the ground

3. Relay information to Buffalo providers and policymakers about the gap between girls' sexual rights and resources **on paper** and those **on the ground**.

Project Phases & Timeline

- Policy maps
- Service maps
- Interviews with providers

Phase 1:

Fall 2019

What sexual rights & resources do girls have **on paper?**

Phase 2:

Summer/Fall 2020

What sexual rights & resources do girls have **on the ground?**

- Video comments from girls

- Journal articles & policy brief [next slide]
- Youth Sexual Rights Script initiative

Phase 3:

Spring 2021-Now

Sharing Information & Taking Action



Between Rights on Paper and Capabilities on the Ground: Policy-Based Barriers to Marginalized Women's Sexual Rights

Laina Y. Bay-Cheng¹ · Jessica J. Mencia¹ · Hannah G. Ginn¹ · Honour E. Odigie¹

Accepted: 7 February 2021

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Abstract

Introduction New York State makes explicit policy provisions to protect the sexual rights of minor-aged women, women labeled with intellectual disability, and immigrant women. In this qualitative policy analysis, we used the principles of Nussbaum's (2000) Capabilities Approach to examine whether marginalized women are actually able to exercise these rights.

Method In Fall 2019 and Spring 2020, we interviewed 39 service providers in Buffalo, New York, to learn about the policies affecting diverse marginalized women's sexual rights and sexual health resources. After verifying the accuracy of providers' perceptions by triangulating these with the policies' texts, we thematically analyzed providers' comments to identify patterns in how policies shaped women's sexual rights.

Results We identified three categories of policy-based barriers: those that regulate women's sexual rights *by design*; those that interfered with sexual rights *by accident*; and policies that obstructed sexual rights *by default*, largely because marginalized women and/or sexuality were not considered. We provide examples of how each policy-based barrier affects each group of marginalized women.

Conclusions Despite living in a state that formally recognizes their sexual rights, the actual sexual capabilities of minor girls, women labeled with ID, and immigrant women are attenuated by social policies. We consider the broad implications of the three types of policy-based barriers and offer specific recommendations for reducing these such that marginalized women are actually able to exercise their sexual rights.

Keywords Sexual rights · Capabilities Approach · Girls and women · Policy analysis · Youth · Intellectual disability · Immigrants

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-021-00546-1>

<https://tinyurl.com/bfcqvzyq>



**Private Matters:
Supporting the Sexual Health of
New York's Youth by
Protecting Sexual Privacy**

 University at Buffalo
School of Social Work

 **HOPE** BUFFALO
THE PLEDGE FOR HEALTHY TEENS
A Project of  CAI

Project Team



Laina Bay-Cheng, MSW, PhD [Principal Investigator]
Studies the impact of social injustice on young women's sexuality



Hannah Ginn, MSW, PhD student
Experience as a sex educator for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities



Jessica Mencia, MSW, PhD student
Experience advocating for reproductive justice and against gender-based violence



Honour Odigie, MSW, PhD student
Experience working at the intersection of gender, immigration, trafficking, & sex work

CONTACT:

ub-capablegirls@buffalo.edu

(716) 645-1225

