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;

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

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

the polices and services that exist on paper

the polices and services that girls see on the ground

on paper

on the ground
Phase 1: Fall 2019
What sexual rights & resources do girls have on paper?
- Policy maps
- Service maps
- Interviews with providers

Phase 2: Summer/Fall 2020
What sexual rights & resources do girls have on the ground?
- Video comments from girls

Phase 3: Spring 2021-Now
Sharing Information & Taking Action
- Journal articles & policy brief [next slide]
- Youth Sexual Rights Script initiative

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

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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

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