

**Professor Colleen Murphy spoke to the class on 12/5 about her work on the Capability Approach:**

**Q. What main takeaways did you leave with and what was something interesting or new that you learned?**

**A.** There were two main takeaways, which are as following:

1. Professor Murphy not only helped us learn the intricate details of capability approach, but also connected us with the real life applications of it. She defines capability as “effective freedom or genuine opportunity individuals have of the things they value”.

She gave two wonderful examples:

i. Mobility in terms of having a bike. Apply capability approach:

- Small kids are not knowledgeable about the bike even if they have it. Stuck.
- If you know how to bike but if you have flat tire, and you don't have pump to fix it. Stuck.
- You are a girl. Maybe in the environment you live in, it is not appropriate for girls to bike. Stuck.

ii. A simple cooking stove used by women in parts of Africa. Apply capability approach:

- The quality of the smoke generated by the stove is harmful, but the women think of that stove as a mosquito repellent, while ignoring the health risks for both themselves and their kids.
- Stove's fuel is generally not accessible. Women would prefer some other ways to cook than to use the stove which makes the stove a mere decoration.
- Stove acts as an important instrument in those women's life, since women usually hold social gatherings where they cook together, so stove has an indirect societal impact.

2. The major takeaway for me, personally, was looking at real-life events and designs through the glass of “capability”. I believe this framework is not only applicable to design but also to real life events. For instance, usually one attributes lack of education as one of the reasons behind all the crime activities. One would think that if the criminal was literate, he/she would not have committed the crime. But when you look through the glass of “capability”, you realise that there are two factors that shape any event in this world: “what you have?” and “what you are able to do with what you have?”. We are missing the second parameter in our reasoning, that is even if the criminal was educated, how did the circumstance or environment play the part in that crime? Thus, if we can figure out the answers to both the questions, and solve them, then world would be a better place to live in. (Actually, I had this conversation with my friend last night about how crimes are increasing against women, and I literally explained him the capability framework and the above application.)

In general, Professor gives us food for thought when we look at product designs. She emphasises on the fact that the product so open up the restrictive freedom, while making sure that the already available freedom is not hampered. Also, connecting those dots to class, she mentions that many restrictions on the freedom is also based on gender norms (such as, there are certain things women aren't supposed to do, while there are things which men are expected to do).

**Q. How could you apply the concept of understanding context to your project? How could you narrow your solution focus so that you are targeting a specific context? What is the specific context that your solution concept will inhabit (i.e. societal norms, built environment, environmental impacts, etc.)?**

**A.** My project is “Women's Reproductive Health”, where we design solution to provide solutions for feminine hygiene products. Let's apply Capability approach on it:

- Guys are not aware about this topic, and also shy away from talking about it, because taboo: Awareness.
- Women wants to buy good quality products, but are financially restricted: Affordability
- Women, having enough money, are not able to access the product due to situational circumstances: Accessibility
- Women in workplace/study place are given free access to such products, but abuse of that resource takes place: Misuse.
- Women are environmentally woke, so they need only eco-friendly solutions: Quality
- Women feel uncomfortable to talk about sanitation, which makes the whole conversation for solution hard: Education.

These are the factors which an individual value when it comes to reproductive health. To increase the freedom for the above values, we cannot produce a very generalised solution because as Professor Muphy rightly pointed out that there are multiple factors such as environmental, familial, regional and cultural norms which play a significant role. Thus, in our solution we are trying to focus on women in study-place environment. Professor also mentions that it's hard to design something for someone who is living the life differently than you. Since we ourselves are the college students, so it makes more sense for my team to start and make difference for the community where we relate and can make a major impact. Thus, we ignore the eco-friendly value, and try to focus on other topics with our proposed solution, that is “pinPad” (an app that helps you track free sanitary products near you). The solution has a restriction of having a smartphone, but we are hoping that in this high-tech world, that wouldn't be a huge restriction in itself. The environmental impact would be that people would have easier access to basic sanitary products, which in turn boosts the women's wellbeing and health (full circle on course title) This also helps highly for students living in harsh weather (someone shouts UIUC) because they will be able to track the sanitary products by just a click of a button while they are sitting on their couch at home, rather than go to the places in person to only find out that the dispenser is out of sanitary napkins. Since, these places would be frequently visited, one can hope that the transport to such places would be of ease which also takes care of connectedness.