

Moms Make Books was designed by Amanda Finuccio at the School of Visual Arts Design for Social Innovation.

It was advised by Benedetta Piantella.

It is dedicated to all the women who gave me their energy, experience, and enthusiasm.

The next generation is in powerful, loving hands.

Introduction

Shortly after I moved to New York City to begin this program, I found myself in a few feminist, sex circles. We spoke about gender, agency, equality, pleasure, consent, expectations. Every time I spoke to a women it wasn't too long before we found ourselves in a conversation about the shame and stigma that came with sex. With each conversation, my head exploded and my heart broke. Even as adults, we still had to unlearn narratives that affect the way we connected with our partners, our friends, and most importantly (yet unfortunately) ourselves.

Sex for me involves so much of what it means to me to be human — connection, intimacy, agency, autonomy, equality, shame, pain, acceptance, joy, pleasure, safety. It's the motherload — a complete and total unraveling of self. It tells us about who we are, what we need, how we deserve to be treated, and and how we express all of that. I don't mean to imply that sex is the only place where this can happen, but I do mean to emphasize it is one of the most vulnerable spaces where this comprehension of self can happen, especially when we consider the mental, emotional, and physical health consequences that can accompany our experiences.

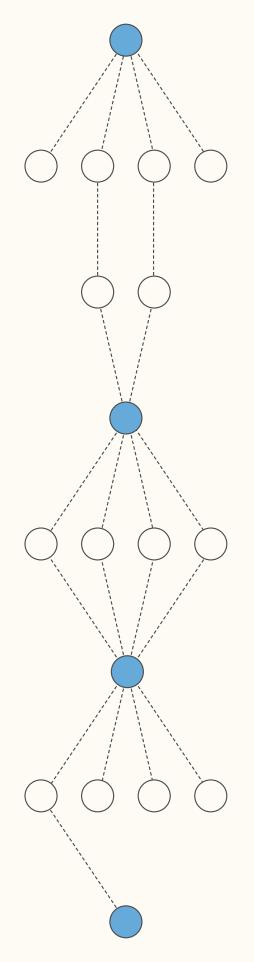
With a hope to understand how even as adults we can find ourselves in conversations about shame, pleasure, and equality, I chose to focus on sex education. I began my research inspiration with Peggy Orenstein's "Girls and Sex" — a book about how girls, in high school in college, navigate the complicated landscape of sex and sexuality today. In her introduction Peggy mentions how, "In 1995 the National Commission of Adolescent Sexual Health declared healthy sexual development a basic human right — teen intimacy ought to be consensual, non-exploitative, honest, pleasurable, and protected against unintended pregnancy and STDs."

This concept of healthy sexual development as a human right became the core motivation behind this work. I knew I wanted to work in this space somehow, to create something that afforded someone more space, more information, more comfort, more hope, more of what they needed to realize sexual health development, their own or someone else's, as a basic human right.

At the beginning of this I didn't know I would come to work with mothers. I'm incredibly glad that I did. Their willingness to share their stories, experience, and goals was an education for me. And for that, I am grateful. So 10 months later...

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TOPIC what is sexual health education?

LANDSCAPE where does it take place? when does it take place?

FORK IN THE ROAD what environment has the most impact & influence?

ENVIRONMENT how does sexual health education happen at home?

INSIGHTS what are the challenges moms face at home?

<u>PROBLEM</u> what's the problem we can work on?

<u>PROTOTYPES</u> what can we explore to get at the problem?

IDEA what's the idea we worked on to get at the problem?

<u>PART 1</u>

Landscape



Health + Education

I started with the goal to understand the state of sexual health education in America: What is sexual education? Where is it taught? When and how frequently is it taught?

Sexual education is the teaching of human sexuality, including intimate relationships, human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexually transmitted infections, sexual activity, sexual orientation, gender identity, abstinence, contraception, and reproductive rights and responsibilities.¹

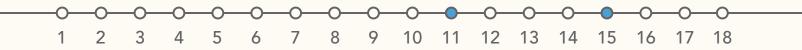
It is the provision of information along with skills-building to help young people communicate about and make informed decisions regarding sex and sexual health.²

It takes place in four environments:

+ school + media and internet +pediatrician's office +home

Each environment has its own unique set of constraints and variables that dictate the time and frequency of education.

School



School education — content, timing, and frequency — is affected by¹:

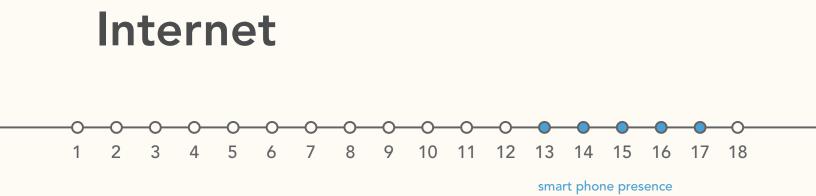
- + state/federal funding
- + state laws/standards
- + school district level policies
- + the curriclum a district/individual school selects
- + the individuals who deliver the program itself.

Among schools that require instruction about pregnancy prevention in 2014, the average class time spent on this topic annually was²:

+ 4.2 hours in high schools+ 2.7 hours in middle schools

Today only:

- + 24 states require public schools teach sex education
- + 20 states require that education be medically accurate.³



The media and internet are always at play throughout the life of a child — movies, television, radio, advertisements, children at school with smart phones, etc.

73% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 have a smart phone.⁴

The average teenager is exposed to nearly 14,000 references to sex each year on television.⁵



Pediatricians typically see patients annually. Every age comes with a conversation:

- + 3 toilet training + 5/6 — gender and good touch/bad touch
- + 8/9 menstruation and puberty
- + 13 alcohol, drugs, and sexual activity

Many health care providers do not talk with their adolescent patients about sexual health issues during primary care visits. When these conversations do occur, they are usually brief; in one study:

conversations with patients ages 12–17 lasted an average of 36 seconds.⁶

Upon speaking with pediatricians for the scope of this research, they mentioned a number of barriers in the way to providing quality sexual health education:

"There isn't a ton of education during residency. It's a difficult conversation and there's no template." — LAUREN, PEDIATRICIAN

"I have 15 minutes to do a full check up. If at any point in that conversation [we] veer off the standard I lose everything. And I still need to find time to kick [their] mom out of the room." — ALEXA, PEDIATRICIAN

6 JAMA Pediatrics, 2014



Sexual health education at home is dictated by family values. Parents often use their personal experience to guide the experience they create at home. Some seek to improve their personal experience and initiate conversations with their children. While others, would rather someone else take care of the conversations. Parents use questions from their children as the primary driver of conversations, specifically siting menstruation and puberty as the beginning of more substantial talks.

"We had our first kind of conversation at 9, she got her period earlier than I expected." — GISELLE, MOM

"At 8-9 (just before puberty for girls) we talk to parents about menstruation and almost always they say, no she is too young." — ALEXA, PEDIATRICIAN

EARLIER + MORE FREQUENT

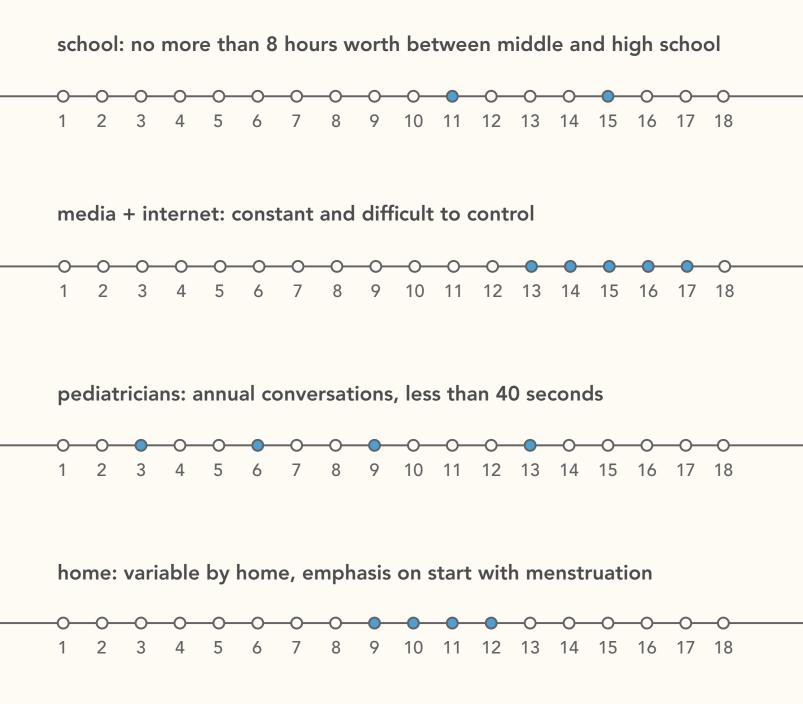
"You baby proof your home when they start walking. Sexual development is like any other development. You need to talk to them at every step of the way."

Amelia, Pediatricians for Reproductive Health

A poll conducted by the Youth Advisory Council of the Sexual Education Alliance of New York City in 2016 collected students' suggestions for improving the quality of sex ed in their schools. The most frequent suggestion they received: by teaching it earlier and more often. – NEW YORK COMPTROLLER REPORT

Analysis

With early and frequent I wanted to see how these four environments overlap to create a full sexual health education experience. I noticed it was sporadic, marked primarily by milestones, with more emphasis later in life.



Fork in the Road

After sitting with what the timeline revealed as well as the reality that I needed access to a community I could work with I came to a fork in the road — pediatricians or moms. I was excited at the prospect of working with pediatricians — to explore how we might be able to maximize their appointment times or make their communications materials more effective. I realized there would be a good deal of red tape in this space and on a number of occassions, conversations with pediatricians, as well as my secondary research, pointed to the importance and influence parents have on the sexual health choices their children make.

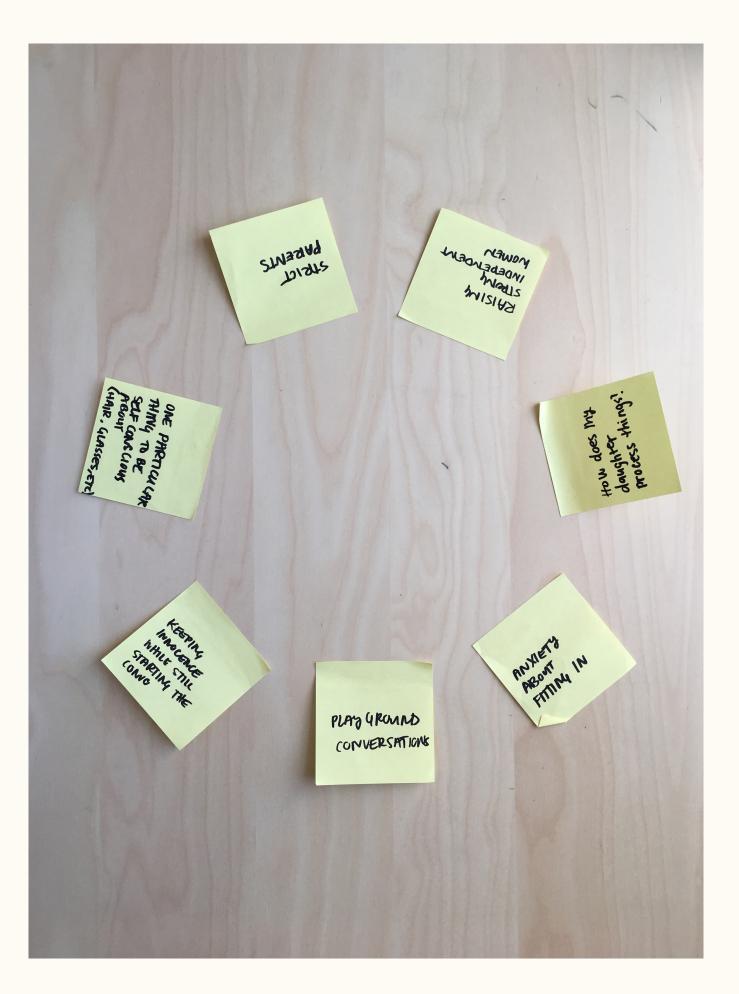
"I asked adolescents who they wanted to talk to about sex, they said their parents, not the information or the nuts and bolts, but their feelings about it, when parents lost their virginity, they were interested in the human dynamics of it."

ATSUKO, PEDIATRICAN

Not only that, since research pointed at the importance of sexual health education earlier and with more frequency, I took into account that pediatricians only see their patients once a year whereas moms can interact with their children daily.

<u>PART 2</u>

Research



Moms

I decided to focus on mothers, specifically with daughters. Mothers are cited as the primary provider of sexual education at home and girls have been reported to receive less sexual health information than boys.^{7,8}

With that in mind, I worked with:

- + 12 moms with daughters between the ages of 4 and 12
- + who identify as their child's primary sex educator
- + in miami (my hometown) and new york city

I was eager to learn what this generation of mothers thought about sex education. I conducted in-depth interviews to learn:

- + what was their sex education like?
- + what role did they want to play in their child's sex education?
- + where do they look for information about sex education?
- + what have they spoken about this far and how did it come up?
- + what kind of relationship would they like with their child?

Motivations

Initial conversations taught me a few things about what moms want and are motivated by. They want to have a primary say in their children's sexual health education. Many of them didn't speak about sex with their parents so it was important to them, especially taking into account the presence of social media today, to have a strong, open, and shame-free relationship with their children. They want their children to bring them their sexual health questions. They want a chance to explain but most importantly a chance to to impart their values, perspective, as well and the messages they find important.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

"There was no mention of sex whatsoever in my house. Everything was heresay and what your friends came up with. My mother told me absolutely nothing."

JUDGMENT AND SHAME

"I don't want to be the one that judges their decisions without hearing their perspective. One day she will want that experience and I don't want to bash that."

CHANCE TO EXPLAIN

"You hear it once and you Google it. I want the chance to explain things. I prefer that they hear it from me than online."

THE VILLAGE

"The village is massive. I have older people to help guide me through these processes."

Challenges

Those motivations and desires don't come without challenges. Moms aren't sure what is age-appropriate information. They want to provide their children with the information they need but worry about giving them too much information, too soon. They want to make sure they talk with their children before sources like the internet get to them. They also find their children are exposed to information sooner than they thought, sooner than they were. They find it difficult to see what is coming down the pipeline and often turn to other mothers for information.

AGE-APPROPRIATE

"You don't want to introduce things too early and when questions come up you want to say the right thing. I worry I will give them an answer that is not at their level." – Angela

PREPARATION

"It never feels easier. Every time it's at a different level and you just try to be as prepared as possible." – Rachel

REACTION

"It's hard to see what's coming. You think they are babies until something happens and you say 'you know about that?!'" – Angela

PIPELINE

"It's really hard to see what's coming; there isn't a lot of visibility on these hazards. I'm trying to work with them on their self-respect tools, their ability to say no, to set boundaries." – Catalina

MORE THAN ANYTHING

"I want to raise a good human. I want a strong relationship. And I want to hear their perspective."

Catalina, mom

Problem + Opportunity

With those insights in mind, I saw this tension between a desire to give their children the information they need before it comes from someone else, but they also don't want to share anything they don't have to. They typically let their children's questions guide their conversations, but find they are surprised to learn their child has already been exposed to something or is dealing with an issue sooner than they anticipated.

Moms want to be their child"s primary source of sexual health information so that they have the opportunity to share the values and messages that are important to them. But they are often unsure about what to say and when. This creates conversations defined by reaction vs. preparation.

With this in mind, I wanted to find a way to give moms the space they need to understand what's age-appropriate and what values/messages they want to share.

Could we create a supportive space for moms to explore the age-appropriate values and messages they want to share with their children so they can feel prepared to have the conversations they want to have?

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Criteria

MOMS

When it came to the moms, I developed a set of design criteria that emphasized a values-based conversations, supportive of their long-term goal to have a strong relationship with their child. When I asked where they access information they spoke about reaching out to other women so I wanted to utilize the knowledge of the village in whatever I made.

- + values-based
- + relationship
- + the village

DAUGHTERS

When it came to their child, I asked how they like to spend time with them. They spoke about being outside and away from screens. They spoke about how much they love the reader in their daughters, books as both a tool they felt comfortable with as well as something their daughters enjoyed doing on their downtime. So I used the following criteria:

+ imaginative+ tech-free+ age-appropriate

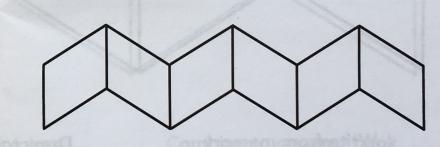
BOOKS

"Imagination comes from reading. Screentime removes them from the pace of the world."

Angela, mom

PART 3 Idea + Iterate

moms make books



MARCH 10, 2018 + MIAMI, FL

Idea + Goals

If moms had a space to think together about their personal experiences and values, would they feel more prepared and comfortable, with a book in hand, to initiate an age-appropriate conversations with their children?

Bookmaking as a way to:

+ feel more <u>prepared</u>, through the exploration of personal values and messages, for sexual health conversations at home, conversations free of shame and judgment

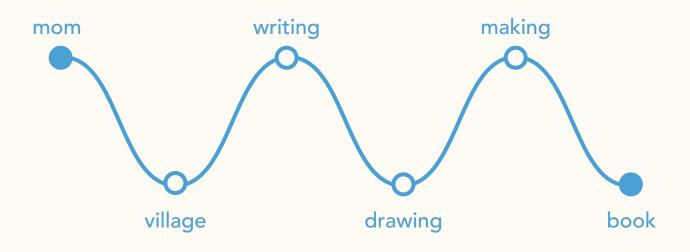
+ feel more <u>comfortable</u>, with the knowledge that the book contains a message they know they want to share with their child, to initiate a conversation at home

+ feel more <u>confident</u>, through the exchange of ideas with other mothers, learning from them where they are and what might be ahead, about what is age-appropriate information

Iteration

I explored this idea through 4 workshops, 2 in Miami and 2 in New York City. Each workshop iterated on the 4 elements: moms connecting, values exploration through writing, creating images from words, and combining them all.

Each page to follow highlights the workshops in the order they took place as well as the question of focus for each workshop.



The Village

What happens when we get the village together to share stories about the personal experience growing up and raising their children now?

When moms got together they sought advice from one another, admitted to what was going on at home that they felt overwhelmed about, found common ground in their experiences, and appreciated one another for the perspective they bring to the table. They enjoyed the time to themselves, to think and make for a little while; to use another part of their brain. By the end of every workshop, through stories or the conversation that followed, they found overlaps and intersects in their values, the messages they want to share, and what they want for their children.

"The advice sought showed we are all in this together." "The age range helps those with younger girls see what's ahead." "I want that book." — one mom to another "I don't think about this, this is good for me to hear."



Write (and share)

What can writing from memory tell us about what we value today?

My first year of graduate school I took a creative writing course with our program director. We spoke at length about the way writing helps us clarify our thoughts. Our first exercise in this class was to write about a transformative memory. When I considered how of the motivations moms had was to *improve their personal experience*. I thought memory would be a unique place to uncover what some of those improvement were and what they said about their values today. I tried 3 things:

take them back to a memory, paint the picture

the first workshop I hosted was to get the village together and see what unfolded. I wanted to try out writing from memory to see what it conjured. The day's conversation focused on body image so I asked them to remember what it was like to be a 12-year old girl getting ready to go to her first dance. It took some to a place about body image and other's not so much. Learning: the writing exercise needs to be significantly more explicit.

start with a topic — i.e. body image, sexuality

My first year of school we did an exercise by the writer and cartoonist Lynda Barry. It invites you to begin with a word — "body image" — and then write the first 10 images that come to mind. You use one of those words to find a memory and then write as much as you can about that memory. I began all of the writing portions of my workshop this way, all but the first. After writings, moms shared as much or as little as they wanted with the group. I learned instruction needed to be more explicit. I needed to make the connection that the memory chosen would inform the book ahead so that moms could choose a memory that felt appropriate to share with their child. This memory exploration was followed by synthesis which took two forms: 1) I used to think...now I think and 2) "I believe statement".

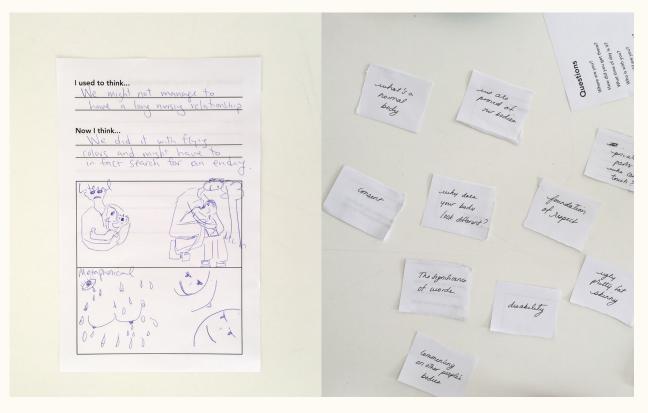
use conversation and collect the topics that emerge

in my last workshop I planned to do the same only the use of memory didn't quite connect with the moms that day. Instead of sticking with the plan I wanted to respond to what I understood they were asking, more time to talk. So I used the conversation to source some keep topics and themes. They then chose the topic that felt most relevant to them, wrote about it the way we would have originally, and condensed their writing into a 1-2 line message that would serve as the content for the book.

< 4.25 → TOPIC _ Body image 10 WORDS: Heathy Bully fat Fit Balance Portion Control Sugar & Cartos Energy Source Muscie curves Protein = ↓ MEMORY: all of my life I've I never knew what 1'm 43 and pren a "flaca." I never knew what it was like to be alloweight, what'l beame a mom. FOY MOAD I ten years the layered on pounds and ust thought whis immune to exter early priming "ohese." A year ago my g V old statied doing the same. Her weight became and my motivation to the third around for nyself. The begin to exercise with which to invalked a take up tennic. I've also started the keto diet 3 wks ago. Now, 12 bs lighter,

paint a memory

start with a topic + 10 words



I used to think...now I think

"I believe" statement

Draw

How do we turn words into images? So it's not intimidating?

Before any of my workshops I hosted a bookmaking workshop for friends. I wanted to see what barriers they would come up against in hopes it would inform what I could do with moms. Learning: Drawing is intimidating. I tried four things:

try without any help or explanation

at my first workshop (before I tried bookmaking with friends) I incorporated drawing into the writing activity. It was simple, straightforward and gave me a sense of how comfortable or uncomfortable they were expressing their thoughts visually.

explaining literal and metaphorical images

At the first bookmaking workshop I decided to make a zine that would function as a workbook for the day. It would double as something moms could keep to revist the day's process. I dedicated a page to the two kinds of images we make: literal and metaphorical. We explore children's books to find examples of both. I also continued to incorporate drawing into every writing activity. The icrebreaker for the day had space to draw as well as the "I used to think...now I think" exercise. It opened up a conversation about how to use literal and metaphorical images but didn't ease moms into the image making that would come with bookmaking

magic prompt: make a quick book

For the third workshop I spoke with my cousin who for his PhD researched how comics could benefit teachings in the classroom — speficially the college classroom. He used this activity called the magic prompt where you: 1) divide a sheet of paper into 8 panels, cover each panel in lines/shapes, then answer the question: drawing feels like..., and break the words up across all 8 panels. The goal is to show how you can attribute concrete words, about feelings, to abstract lines.

jam comic: make a quick book together (winner!)

One of the suggestions from workshop #2 was to have the drawing portion be more collaborative. Insert the jam comic. It's similar to the magic prompt. You divide a sheet of paper into 8 panels, break up your story amongst the 8 panels, illustrate the first panel, and then in a group, have everyone else finish your panels. It was a huge success and taught literal and metaphorical images by default. Moms borrowed one another's ideas and it made the bookmaking process a giant collaboration.



explain images

magic prompt



jam comic



Supportive Elements

How do we pepper this process with some supportive elements?

In between writing, sharing, and drawing, I iterated on some supportive elements. Transitions that connected moms, inspired, or provide helpful details.

surprised or excited

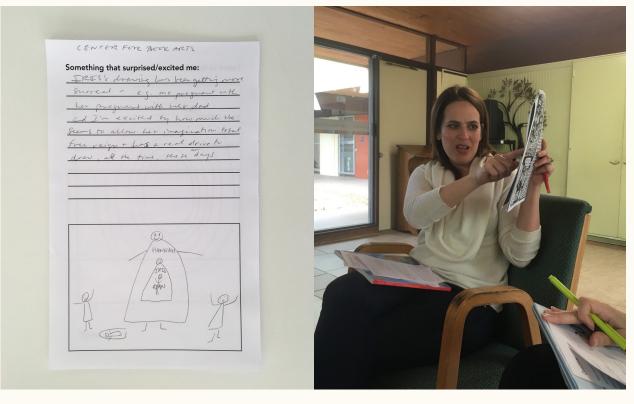
The icebreaker for every workshop was a question about their child. The one I used most was "what was something that happened recently with your daughter that surprised or excited you?" It was a great way for moms to talk about their children and get to know one another.

book samples

For my second workshop, at the suggestion of the mom I was working with, I made a few book samples to show what books around these topics could like like. It helped provide insight and detail come bookmaking time. Moms enjoyed the samples I made and it provided some much desired clarity.

storytime for adults

Lynda Barry became a big guide for me throughout this process. She wrote a story about how when she started drawing she learned quickly that they were good images and bad images. She got in trouble at school for drawing an image of two naked women dressed as rabbits. She tells the story of how that experience affected her desire to draw and how ultimately it stifled her creativity. In my third workshop we read this story as a group to get into the mindset of loving our work, loving what we make, and loving where it comes from.



surprised or excited

story time



book samples





How it Works

age-appropriate topic



write

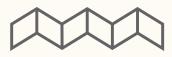
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Moms write from memory to reflect on a personal experience that points to a value or message that feels important to share. Moms share their stories and use them to spark group conversation. After group conversation we synthesize memories or group conversation into a concise message we use as the storyline for the book.



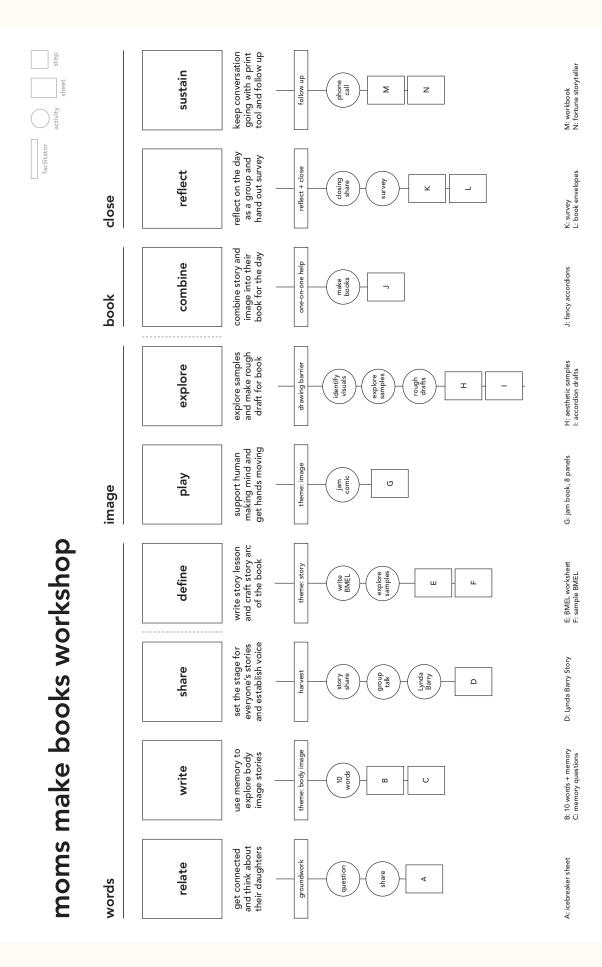
draw

After a message is chosen we use a collaborative drawing session to explore image making — styles, ideas, concepts, etc. Moms can use this to inform the visuals for their books or just as practice.



book

Then we make books! Moms spend about an hour breaking up their message about the panels of an accordion book. By the end of the day each mom takes home a book they can share with their child.



Differently

What would I do differently and/or like to do/didn't do?

try the traditional story arc

For the final workshop I planned to try a traditional story arc format for the books. We didn't end up using it but I'm really curious to see how that would affect the kind of books moms make.

tweak writing from memory

Throughout all of the writing exercises I noticed either my instructions weren't explicit enough, moms were uncomfortable sharing certain memories, or memory didn't feel like the right place to pull from. It was a successful strategy for three of the workshops so I don't feel it's without. I do think I could do a better job framing its approach and where it will lead.

tighten age range a little bit

The first workshop taught me that moms valued speaking with moms whose children were older than theirs. It helped them see what was coming down the pipeline and motivated them to have certain conversations earlier. The last workshop was the opposite, moms represented a much tighter age range and it was nice to see the commnality they found in their book messages because of that. I think there are benefits to both and would like to find a way to do both or combine them.

explore daughters and sons

A few of the mothers who attended the workshops had sons, some only had sons and others had both sons and daughters. The ones who had both expressed an interest in doing this for topics relevant to their sons' life. I also noticed how having moms who represent both sons and daughters exposed commonality between the development of both genders. I'd like to explore this more with workshops that promote to both moms with sons and moms with daughters. I'd like to see where their experiences align and what insights come from having a spectrum of genders at the table.

PART 4

Measure

Measure

The ultimate goal of the workshop was to create a space where moms could take time to feel more prepared, comfortable, and confident about the conversations — the values and messages — they want to have with their children. To measure I passed out a written survey at the end of each workshop, end-goal questions included:

- + after today, what do you feel motivated to do with your child?
- + how likely are you to share this book with your child?
- + would you recommend this workshop to another parent?

Looking back, I realized there were much stronger methods for evaluating how well the workshop hit my goals. Moving forward I would like to conduct a survey before the workshop begins to gauge:

- + how comfortable do you feel intiating conversations about sexual health?
- + how prepared do you feel to express your values/opinions about [topic]?
- + how confident do you feel about the values/messages relevant to your child today?

That said, I think the workshop had a lot of positive outcomes for mothers. Here are there answers to my question: "After today, what do you feel motivated to do with your child?"

"Communicate more about self-care, being happy and positive.

"Share more stories and beliefs with my daughter."

"Create more stories together. This [book] will start a whole big stream of new dialogue and questions."

"Share what's in my head. I need to share [my] path of heartache, I need to give her [my] life hacks."

"Spend more time sharing [my] knowledge."

"Sit and read the book, talk about the things that worry her about her body."

Measure (continued)

Every mother who attended the workshop say they would recommend this to another parent and would come back for the opportunity to connect with other moms as well as to explore more topics and create more stories. A few other benefits came from their time at the workshop:

TIME FOR THEMSELVES

"I don't usually have time like this for myself. I like that I got to use a different part of my brain and could get away from strategizing for another."

UNCOVER COMMONALITY

"Our messages are so similar. It's amazing to see the overlap in our present experiences.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT

"Just listening to us now, these are things I think about, but I don't know that I have ever said these lessons and values out loud to my daughter."

"[When something happens] you are reacting to your child because you haven't thought it through, you want to avoid shame but you're not prepared, you're caught off guard, you're surprised."

Two Stories

LOURDES AND BENEDETTA

During the workshop I asked moms if they would be open to a follow up call so I could find out about whether or not they shared the book and how their daughter responded. Two moms shared their stories with me. One more text me after the workshop to share that her daughter loved her book so much, she made an art piece (image on the right). Another mother, whose daughter was at the workshop as inspired to make her own book. It read: "you are part of the ocean. you are sparkly. you are golden. you are beautiful. you are you."



Looking Beyond

When I think about *Moms Make Books* I think about my last workshop. I melted when I heard one mom said to another:

"I want to buy your book."

Before that I had thought about the power of a platform where moms make books that other moms want to buy — a mom-authored, values-based, sexual health education bookshop. The workshop could serve as the place where the books are made and they could be reproduced physically or digitally. Moms could learn from the lessons and experiences of other moms as well as create their own content, their own stories. Fathers could get involved and do the same. And eventually mothers, fathers, adn their children could colalborate on books. Books made by families to redefine the influence and impact of sexual health education at home.

Thank you

My Parents, Patricia Rosello and Michael Finuccio

Thank you for being my biggest supporters and inspiration. I love you both.

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For the creation of a program, that brought me to the people and education I will carry with me forever.

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Jarod Rosello

For sharing your experience with me so I could make drawing way more fun.

Single Thesis Moms

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