The Académie de l’Artisanat is a new take on vocational learning that builds agency by inspiring girls to learn new skills, and leverages that agency to help them make smart reproductive health decisions for their future. At its core, it is a weekly workshop just for girls held at PSI centers in Benin. Girls, especially those who are not in school, learn a new skill such as beading, and spend time mastering that skill while receiving information about sex, reproductive health and contraception, and getting linked to free services. A young program leader cultivates relationships with Académie participants and encourages them to visit a nurse to learn more about how they can protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy.

Workshops: the heart of the Académie

Workshops are the core of the Académie. Each of them have three components:

TEEN EVENTS are invite-only, and are held at the Centre Jeune Amour et Vie. Members of the Académie get to choose who they want to invite. By giving girls control over invitations, these events elevate girls’ social status and offer her the opportunity to flip the power structure—she’s in control!

During the event, boys and girls participate in activities such as singing, gombo dancing, model, theater and spoken word. Health educators also deliver health talks to attendees, offering to connect them to services during or after the event.

Seasonal Craft Faires are opportunities for girls to participate in organizing an event, and selling their goods together with their peers. They help raise awareness about the Académie de l’Artisanat within the community, and they also spread the word about teens’ talents and self-esteem.

Craft faires are organized by the girls themselves. By giving girls the opportunity to facilitate and run a major community event, we build her confidence and help her see just how much she can contribute to her community.
No one wants to talk about sex, but everyone wants a solution to teen pregnancy.

**INSIGHT #1**

"If a girl becomes pregnant it’s because she didn’t master her cycle. Parents should tell their daughters to just stay away from boys."

Insights are the core fieldwork learnings that present opportunities for design. Insights are not necessarily the most frequent observations we saw in the field, they don’t last forever, and they are not necessarily representative of all of the boys, girls and families that we spoke with. Rather, they are patterns of observations that present us, as designers, with interesting tensions that enable us to see our design challenge from a different perspective. Here are the 6 insights from our work in Benin.

Teenage sex is a currency with no exchange rate.

**INSIGHT #2**

Men are expected to be providers—transactional sex is a boys’ version of this.

Sex among adolescents has an implicit value. It ranges from the cost of fulfilling the most basic of needs, such as food, a photocopy or school fees, to the aspirational, such as a new pair of underwear.

In a town with few economic opportunities, boys are expected to find ways to earn money and support their families. If a boy needs money, he goes to work; if a girl needs money, she goes to her family, then to boys. Girls get what they need, and boys get their sexual needs met.

Boys start chasing after girls at a young age. The other girls won’t share secrets and can’t be trusted. Parents expect girls to get good grades and spend the day on house chores. It can feel like everyone is out to get them, and they often navigate the new challenges of adulthood alone.

The community has progressive views of gender equality, and laments that pregnancies are taking teen girls out of school. Girls are encouraged to finish school, and to earn money after graduating.

Teens are interested in modern things: cell phones, jewelry, nice underwear. And, they are coming of age in a time when modern contraception is available. Lacking first-hand experience with these new things, moms want to guide their daughters, but don’t know how.

"If she can’t buy a book, and a man helps her, this would not be for free."

"A good teenage boy will give you money. Don’t trust him."

"A girl should try to marry well; she needs financial support."

Despite the challenges they face, girls have more equal opportunity than ever.

"A girl is allowed to marry when she’s 18."

"Teachers are champions at impregnating teenagers. They use money to entice them and girls are not courageous enough to say no."

Modern influences create a rift between generations, and mothers are at a loss.

"The situation is the same everywhere—they no longer listen to us."

"If you take care of your daughter, you will succeed."

"If you don’t have a family who guide you, you’re in trouble."

"Parents should do what they can—keep their daughter close to their boys."

"When a girl is learning a trade, she should wait to have a child until she’s finished."

Despite the challenges they face, girls have more equal opportunity than ever.

"The more you reduce the message, the more—no one listens."

"When a man asks for more, a girl should not always say yes."

Insights are the core fieldwork learnings that present opportunities for design. Insights are not necessarily the most frequent observations we saw in the field, they don’t last forever, and they are not necessarily representative of all of the boys, girls and families that we spoke with. Rather, they are patterns of observations that present us, as designers, with interesting tensions that enable us to see our design challenge from a different perspective. Here are the 6 insights from our work in Benin.
In Cote D’Ivoire, our design challenge was to identify and engage young men in positive conversations about sex, relationships and modern contraception.

While doing fieldwork in Abidjan, we learned that young men are excited about women and relationships, but they are less interested in sexual health or contraception. We knew that if we wanted to reach them, we needed to meet them where they are at. Our design question became:

How might we use dating advice to encourage young men in supporting contraception behaviors?

Our solutions was Didier, an SBCC program that engages youth in positive dialogue about sex and relationships. At its core, Didier is an ongoing interactive story delivered through Messaging, Facebook, and Events. Didier uses dating advice as an entry point to sensitize young men about the benefits of supporting their partners’ needs and reproductive choices.

The Didier Story

Didier is a 17 year-old apprentice living in Abobo, Abidjan. He left his home town in Gbêkê two years ago looking for his father who came to the city and never returned. Didier’s dream is to make a living in the big city. His girlfriend Grace is a hardworking student. She wants to abstain until she finishes school and achieves her dream of becoming a lawyer. Didier respects his big brother Joel, who knew his father, is happily married and recently started a family. Joel advises Didier to support Grace and not pressure her. Didier is influenced by his boss Yves, a bus driver famous for his sexual conquests. Sometimes they go out to the club together after work. Didier recently met a beautiful woman named Grace who is more ethnically similar. The two become romantically involved and grace begins to see didier as more than just a friend. Grace is known for enlightening men about women’s sexual desires and making them drop at her feet. Didier loves Grace, and wants to wait for her, but he is intrigued by Anna and not sure what to do. If only Didier knew Anna is Yves’ ex-girlfriend, whom he still loves…

The Characters

Grace: The Hardworking Student
Didier: The Apprentice
Anna: The Ex-Girlfriend
Joel: The Big Brother
Yves: The Boss

The Power of Choice

Throughout the story, Didier engages in sex and relationship dialogues with strong women. Grace and Anna. Their interactions present Didier with questions on contraception and how their choices affect his life and the lives of those around him.

Through SMS, Facebook, and events, the audience follows along with the story and can vote on how it progresses at key moments. When the story progresses toward gender-blind and irresponsible contraception choices, Didier experiences the serious consequences of his actions. When Didier makes good choices, he experiences success. By monitoring the audience’s vote, we can observe change in gender sensitization and contraception choices over time.
Insights from Cote D’Ivoire

Young men emulate their bachelor bosses, but dream of a traditional future.

Young men working in the informal sector spend a good part of their resources on women. Sex is a focal point in their lives, and having more sex is young men’s number one goal.

Growing up among unspoken conversations about intimacy, needs, and sex health. Young women want condoms, but only men can carry them.

Having more sex is young men’s number one goal.

With others I use a condom, but not with the girl I love the most. If she gets pregnant, it’s an act of God.

Having sex with their girlfriends. But they don’t see condoms as a contraceptive. In case of pregnancy, they may accept responsibility for the baby if it’s with the girl they love, or simply walk away.

Growing among unspoken expectations, no one is equipped to talk about sex.

Young women may resort to unprotected sex to keep a boyfriend’s attention, prove her fidelity, and maintain the relationship. They give gifts, attention, and acquiesce to the use of condoms. But the power shifts as men’s attention wanes. With time, young men’s supportive behavior often turns coercive.

As relationships progress, young men’s supportive behavior often turns coercive.

HIV matters, but pregnancy is not a young man’s problem.

If he finishes before me I say ‘What’s the problem?! Are you sick or what?!’"