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The Eden Project: A City Wide Youth Conference and Fashion Show to Increase Body Image and Self-Esteem in Adolescent Girls

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THE EDEN PROJECT: A CITY WIDE YOUTH CONFERENCE AND FASHION SHOW TO INCREASE
BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS

By

Nicole R. Parsons

Honors Capstone Project

Submitted to the Faculty of

Olivet Nazarene University

for partial fulfillment of the requirements for

GRADUATION WITH UNIVERSITY HONORS

April, 2013

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

in

FASHION MERCHANDISING

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To every girl who's ever struggled to love herself.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the development of body image and self-esteem in adolescent girls and discusses the impact both positive and negative factors can have during this developmental stage of life. It argues the idea that a girl's positive feelings regarding her external appearance can drastically influence her self-esteem, which in turn affects how she treats herself, as well how she allows others to treat her. This paper also follows the history of fashion shows, discussing their influence in media outlets that adolescent girls often turn to when searching for an identity in this culture. Pulling from a Christian perspective, the paper also introduces how churches deal with these negative factors and attempt to develop a positive self-image in adolescent girls.

The research has been used to develop an all girl's youth conference for adolescent girls between the ages of 11 and 14, which was held at College Church of the Nazarene in Bourbonnais, IL on November 9th, 2012. The paper will outline the schedule of the event, the topics discussed during the conference, the reactions from parents and students, and will present the results of a ten question survey completed by each attendee. Limitations regarding budget, time and professional relationships will also be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

There is power in outward beauty, and while there are those who shrug it off as an unfortunate and inaccurate reality, it is nevertheless a key factor in the formation of the adolescent self. Body-image, in fact, plays such a significant role in the development of self-worth, that it is often a leading cause of low self-esteem during adolescence (Santrock, 2007, p. 148). Because attitudes and mentalities shaped during this developmental stage often carry over into adulthood, it is likely that girls who experience a low self-image during their teenage years will continue to experience serious ramifications long after adolescence has passed.

During adolescence, individuals begin to seek validation from sources outside of their personal thoughts. The opinions of others are suddenly much more important than ever before, and self-worth often becomes dependent on attaining an idealistic persona that society presents. These ideals, however, ignore the fact that beauty is not stagnant, that it is not exclusive to any one body-type. Rather, it pulls from the diversity and the differences between individuals. While many teenage girls dream of the “perfect” body type, a very small percentage of these girls will actually reach this standard, but not for lack of trying.

Unfortunately, today’s young women are bombarded with so many unattainable images, that the disparity between their perceived self and their ideal self steadily grows. It is this inconsistency, this longing, that often rips at a girl’s self-worth and causes depression, eating disorders, and other negative effects. However, with so much emphasis placed on external appearance in today’s culture, simply dismissing its importance does not address the problem entirely. Rather, a girl must learn to value her uniqueness, to measure her outward

beauty not on the standards culture sets, but instead on her personal style, appearance and personality.

Therefore, the purpose and mission of the Eden Project originates in the truth that every girl should feel beautiful, not in terms society dictates, but in terms they set for themselves. The project attempts to respond to the growing immodesty and the unrealistic beauty and body-type standards of the fashion industry by portraying modesty, individualism and inner beauty as positive ideals for preteen and teenage girls. Pulling from the idea that what a girl wears outwardly reflects how she views herself inwardly, the project seeks to encourage an entire transformation that betters both the inner and outward appearances.

The Eden Project also pulls from a Christian standpoint, and encourages girls to find their identity in something much larger than themselves. It aims to teach each attendee how to truly be a Christian girl growing up in today's often anti-Christian world, yet still feel beautiful outwardly and inwardly. The girl who understands this is the girl who lives up to the Biblical standards of femininity. By presenting the standards defined in Proverbs 31 as beautiful, each girl in attendance can learn how to develop her inward self as well as her outward self.

To do this, the Eden Project ultimately consists of two main components. The first portion, an area-wide, all girls conference for middle school girls, is an event where young girls can learn about inner and outer beauty in a controlled and positive environment. The conference provides a large variety of information designed to make each girl look and feel beautiful, such as wardrobe advice, faith truths and body image discussions. The conference seeks to promote a positive body image for adolescent girls that will carry over into adulthood.

The second component is a fashion show, which takes place at the end of the conference, and features local preteen and teenage girls who attended the event. Parents are invited to attend this portion to watch and support their daughters. Designed to show young women that beauty is not dependent on immodest or any sort of extreme dress, the show is an opportunity for the girls to flaunt their individual beauty while surrounded by their family and friends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-worth begins in adolescence. It is during these few years that a young girl develops her sense of identity and value as a human being. In fact, of all the developmental stages of life, adolescence is characterized the most by dramatic changes, increased introspection and self-consciousness centered primarily around self-image and what others think (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010, p. 42-3). This small span of years contributes more to a girl's self-esteem and self-concept than any other time during her life. She will be faced with the reality of that fact well beyond her thirties; if she was unfortunate enough to leave puberty with a low self-image, it will continue to manifest itself.

The adolescent brain quickly develops the ability to interact with sociocultural experiences, which influences this self-understanding. The brain learns how to think abstract and idealistic thoughts and how to make sense of a broader spectrum of knowledge. In most cases, this ability is a welcomed asset, allowing students to solve more complex math problems, grasp deeper meanings in literature and feel relationships on a more intimate level (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010, p39-40). However, in areas such as the self, the abstract and idealistic thoughts can cause more problems than they solve.

While not all adolescents think of themselves in idealistic ways, most can identify between who they really are and who they can become, which can either be who they hope to be or who they fear becoming. However, if the difference between the real self and the projected ideal self becomes too great, it can trigger a sense of failure and criticism, which has been linked to adolescent and adult depression (Santrock, 2007, p 141-2). In other words, if an

adolescent girl finds that she is not able to reach beauty or body type standards set for her, her self-worth is likely to diminish.

Existing within the confines of a low self-image is damaging to a girl's mental and physical health. According to a study by Fenzil, low self-esteem has been linked to adolescent depression, suicide, anorexia nervosa, and delinquency, as well as many other adjustment problems (as cited in Santrock, 2007, p. 149). These facts alone are staggering, considering that problems which begin in adolescence often remain well past puberty. In fact, according to most researchers, as many as 94% of American women today are still facing self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction first encountered in adolescence (Marano, 1991, p. 22). The importance of the ideals and attitudes developed during this developmental stage cannot be understated.

According to researchers, body dissatisfaction is defined as a "negative subjective evaluation of one's physical body" (Glauert et. al., 2010, p. 42) and seems to be one of the most powerful cause of a low self-esteem in adolescence. In fact, in one study by Lord and Eccles, they found that "adolescents' concept of their physical attractiveness was the strongest predictor of their overall self-esteem" (as cited in Santrock, 2007, p. 148). If a girl does not perceive herself as beautiful, the dissatisfaction with herself only grows.

This idea of body image, or an adolescent's private assessment of how others evaluate her body and physical appearance (Marano, 1991, p. 22), is often incomplete. It is difficult for individuals, adolescents in particular, to be objective about their 'self'. While it's true that adolescents are more likely than children to become preoccupied with a sort of self-understanding, they frequently use peer comparison and idealized media images to evaluate themselves (Santrock, 2007, p. 143; Manning, 2007, p.12). These internal, self-evaluations,

however, do not always reflect reality. Adolescents often find themselves lacking and feel they must display a false self to impress classmates and, more specifically, romantic interests (Santrock, 2007, p. 142). When an adolescent girl feels she cannot truly be herself, she can begin to see her true persona as ugly and insignificant.

According to a nationwide survey compiled by DeMoss and Gresh, authors of *Lies Young Women Believe* (2001), 84% of young women agreed with the statement “I can only be myself around people who are like me, such as friends my own age” and admitted to radical differences between who they are at home and who they are with friends (p. 103-5). On the other hand, these same girls also expressed a deep fear of being considered a hypocrite, stating they hated the act and didn’t want to fall into it themselves. But, when faced with the possibility of being ostracized from a group of their peers, adolescent girls continue to hide their true identity. Feeling “left out” can fill young girls with a sense of secret shame (Jakes, 1999, p. 43), which propels them to consistently display this false self.

According to Christian beliefs, God doesn’t want his children to live a hypocritical existence. Instead, he wants his children to be single minded, living out a genuine faith in every aspect of life. In James 4:8 (NIV), God calls out to his followers, stating “draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” A double-minded person is “unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8 NIV). It is vital for adolescent girls to put off this hypocrisy and begin to live a life that is true to them and to God.

Instead of looking to God or the church, however, culture is the underlying source of an adolescent’s evaluation standards. Researchers have found that when adolescents are faced with certain cultural values—believing, for example, that physical attractiveness will lead to

higher self-esteem and make one more popular—a negative perception of one’s appearance, lower self-esteem and an increase in disordered eating occurs (Santrock, 2007, 145). An adolescent’s perception of herself changes and adapts to the cultural environment surrounding her (p. 149); therefore, it is not difficult to understand why, in a culture focused on outer, physical beauty, a girl’s opinion of her attractiveness is the most important factor of her self-esteem.

Today’s media undoubtedly provides adolescent girls with an unrealistic view of the ‘ideal’ female body (Glauert et. al., 2010, p. 42). American culture has established a model of female attractiveness which regards an extreme degree of thinness as the height of beauty, a thinness that does not come naturally to the majority of women. This view disregards the fact that people are naturally healthiest in a variety of shapes and sizes (Marano, 1991, p. xi). It is this diversity that creates beauty and interest. Unfortunately, the images of women in today’s media conform to a single culturally acceptable stature. This standard of beauty only empowers a small select group of women (p. 21), leaving those who don’t fit into the prescribed sizes to work through their low self-image alone.

Fashion shows are a major source of body dissatisfaction in today’s culture. In their beginning, fashion shows were paramount in developing the American department store and were focused on universal rather than artistic design. Unfortunately, today many designers develop new clothing lines based on an idealistic, more aesthetically interesting, female figure and require that the models fit their clothing, instead of the reverse (Godart & Mears, 2009, p. 672). Designers create clothing lines based on one body shape, and after the clothing is put together, it is easier to fit the model to the garment rather than fit the garment to the model

(Height and modeling, 2004, p. 1). Therefore, only one body type is featured in runway shows because it is simpler to design garments to fit the tall and the thin.

Thus, fashion modeling is a major example of collective decision making within the fashion industry. The modeling agencies act as gatekeepers, selecting a handful of models for the producers from which to choose. On the whole, each potential model has the same physical attributes: above average height and extremely thin physique. Even though some state governments have called for bans on unhealthy thin models, strict regulation of body weight is still the most common physical feature among the choices (Godart & Mears, 2009, p. 675). If a model cannot meet those physical standards, she will not be able to fit the clothing designed.

Because of the extreme similarities in size, the choice of the models must be based on other factors. Many times, producers claim they select models based on their “look,” an ambiguous combination of her personality, her reputation, her runway and her appearance (Godart & Mears, 2009, p. 677). In reality, a model’s “look” is centered on how she wears the designer’s clothing and whether or not her physical appearance will match the tone of the show. The selection process requires the models to become “aesthetic laborers” selling their personalities and their bodies as exchangeable goods in the market place (p. 678).

Modeling agencies, acting as gatekeepers for fashion show producers, overlook the fact that people are naturally healthiest, and more beautifully interesting to look at, in a variety of shapes and sizes (Marano, 1991, p. xi). Many planning resources for similar events even suggest that producers select a diversity of models, to preview how an outfit will look on an individual of any size (Fitzpatrick, 2009, p. 7). Agencies and producers prefer tall, thin models,

nevertheless, because of the predefined selection process and sample sizes. For this reason, though theoretically each designer could choose his or her own models of different sizes, collective taste converges and only a handful of women are socially defined as “hot.”

Society as a whole has demonstrated a bias toward thin bodies (Glauert et. al., 2010, p. 48) and seldom portrays more average size women in the media. This omission has grave implications on adolescent girls and adult women, implying that “those who do not fit into [smaller sizes] do not fit into life” (Marano, 1991, p. 4-5). As Marano (1991) also points out:

“If we do not see a reflection of ourselves [in today’s media], we may come to doubt that we even have a right to exist. Certainly, it is hard for us to know ourselves, let alone like ourselves. We are made to feel unfeminine and unattractive, when in fact we are not (p. xi).”

The media’s image of the ‘perfect’ woman is far too narrow, leading adolescent girls of all sizes, whether large or small, to doubt their self-worth (p. xi). It leans on the misguided assumption that the value of a woman is found in her physical rather than her internal beauty.

Furthermore, while many fashion show producers claim that they do not select girls who are at an unhealthy weight, according to a 2002 study completed in New York City and Los Angeles, “81% of their ‘editorial fashion’ models were 5’9” and above, 15% were between 5’8” and 5’9”, and only 4% were below 5’8” tall” (Height and modeling, 2004, p. 1). This, coupled with the average weight of models, hovering between 100 and 110 pounds (p. 2), suggests that most models are under the healthy suggested weight and are classified as ‘underweight’ on a BMI chart. Moreover during an interview, the Creative Director for Doll, Lee Lapthorne,

maintained that “the size of the model is not necessarily an indication of their health” (The fashion show club, 2009, p. 39).

What today’s culture fails to realize, however, is that this beauty is only temporary and surface deep; society’s obsession with remaining youthful is only an exercise in futility. As the proverb clearly states “charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting” (Proverbs 31: 30, NIV). What a young girl believes about beauty is determined by where she receives the information (DeMoss & Gresh, 2001, p. 76). Hearing and believing false statements and unattainable standards presented by the world is damaging to an adolescent girl’s self-esteem. These outward sources seek to determine an adolescent’s self-confidence and often erode self-worth (Farrel & Hanna, 2009, p. 55), but the world’s standards are impossible to reach.

God’s standard of beauty can be achieved, on the other hand. The beauty that matters most is internal and it is this beauty that should be reflected outwardly (DeMoss & Gresh, 2001, p. 76). A young woman’s outward appearance reflects the heart, which should be pure, joyful and full of life. As 1 Peter 3:3-4 (ESV) states, a young woman’s beauty should not simply be external, but she should “adorn the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” Adolescent girls need to know the degrading impact of excessive attention to outward beauty while neglecting the inner beauty of the heart.

Culture and media today also present the unattainable “ideal” woman as a sexualized object to adolescent girls. According to Grabe and Hyde (2009), “research has suggested that girls begin to internalize messages from the media regarding their bodies as young as the age of 7 years” (p. 2840). Every day, adolescent girls are surrounded by messages claiming that “the

right to undress in public is...essential to feminine self-expression" (Pixler, 2011, p. 1) and that nakedness and casual sex are the epitome of female empowerment (Tarrant, 2008, p. 1). It is the girl's right to dress how she pleases, no matter how much skin shows.

These ideas, however, don't lead girls to a more fulfilled existence. Any girl who dresses immodestly is not showing love, contrary to what she may believe, to anyone. She is not showing respect for herself and fools herself into thinking that any man who "ogles" is giving her love in return (Pixler, 2011, p. 3). Sexualized ideas and images are found at the root of self-objectification, a type of self-consciousness in which an adolescent is constantly preoccupied with her outward appearance (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010, p. 42). If she feels being noticed by potential romantic interests is dependent on how "sexy" she looks, her external appearance will gravitate toward that aesthetic.

Society has done nothing but provide images pushing adolescent girls toward immodesty, and therefore towards self-objectification. Adolescent girls are already "morbidly preoccupied with how they appear in the eyes of others," (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010, p. 43) and the modern immodesty ethos they face every day forces them to believe that in order to be beautiful, they must look and act like the images the media provides (Pixler, 2011, p 2). The objectification theory stems from this. It's centered on the belief that girls who are constantly treated as an object to look at begin to internalize these actions and before long, treat their own bodies in the same manner (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010, p. 42). It is a description of the many instances when a girl is made to feel like she is a thing for other's sexual use and enjoyment (Grabe & Hyde, 2009, p. 2840) rather than a human being with the ability to think and act independently.

Sexual objectification is especially problematic when it occurs during adolescence (Grabe & Hyde, 2009, p 2840). Ideas ingrained into a girl during this formative stage of life will develop into deeper rooted beliefs and will shape her life and her actions. Harrison and Fredrickson found during their study that self-objectification became much more prevalent and lasting in early to mid-adolescence (as cited in Slater & Tiggemann, 2010, p. 43), which further stresses the importance of dealing with these issues early on. Social learning theory holds that adolescents will begin to adopt certain behaviors they see which are viewed as socially appropriate, or rather, behaviors that will provide a sense of value and reward (Grabe & Hyde, 2009, p. 2841). This is why, in this culture seeping “with sexualized representations of women, girls learn to treat and experience themselves as sexual objects” (p. 2842).

Modesty obviously is not a popular notion in today’s culture. Many women feel that promoting any idea of modesty, in either dress or ideas, also promotes male chauvinism (Pixler, 2011, p. 1). They center this argument on the fact that rules of modesty are usually more focused on women—giving them instruction on what they can and can’t wear, what they can and can’t do—without restricting males in the same way (Tarrant, 2008, p. 2). Women today want to feel in control of their own body, free of the influence and interference of others (p.1). This same philosophy applies to abortion and premarital sex. In their view, sexualized behaviors and immodest clothing has the potential to open up outlets to women they were denied before and give them equal footing in this so called “man’s world.”

Women claim that sexual freedom, and the immodest dress that goes along with it, empowers them and offers self-assurance and independence. However, it would seem that just the opposite is true. As Pixler (2010) points out:

It is actually immodesty that represses women and turns them into dehumanized objects of leering male lust. When men treat women this way, without a grain of respect for them as a person, as nothing more than an object to be ogled or a live sex toy to be handled, then the humanity of the woman as a woman – in other words, her existential feminine persona – is degraded. She is not just being degraded as a human; she is being degraded as a woman (p. 2).

It is modesty, not immodesty, that promotes femininity and women as a whole person. It takes away men's distraction and preoccupation with the exposed female body and gives women back their dignity and self-respect.

The power of femininity is modesty, but modesty is not hiding outward beauty. There are those who say Christianity today seems to be pushing modesty to an extreme, not only speaking out against immodest fashion, but fashion in general (Gresh, 2002, p. 16). However, the Bible itself encourages followers to dress well and present the outward self beautifully. The psalmist says in Psalm 45:11 that God is enthralled by the beauty of his children and the Bible frequently mentions the physical beauty of women, some even using cosmetics and fashion to enhance their beauty. Rather than being condemned, beauty and fashion should be nearly synonymous with God's glory (Gresh, 2002, p. 23).

Adolescent girls need support from their parents and from their peers to maintain a positive self-image (Manning, 2007, p. 13). To feel as though they have value and worth, girls need to feel competent in areas they view as important (p. 12), and studies have shown that the most important domain is attractiveness. It is the duty of the parent, not society, to teach lasting values to her daughter, to remind her that beauty, real beauty, is more than just skin

deep. Encouraging modesty empowers girls to be who they really are, not the over-sexualized clichéd woman the media tells them they have to be. In this sort of reality, a girl doesn't have to live a cookie cutter life she sees on television (Marano, 1991, p. xii). Instead, she is living her own life and reaching for her own goals and ambitions.

Sadly, adolescent girls are often looked over. Too young to be considered adults, but no longer young enough to be children, this age group is categorized as moody, self-centered and outspoken (Rawson, 2005, p. 9). However, it is during this stage in a young woman's life that she is most pliable. Parents and teachers should be pushing girls to "discover and appreciate how great it is that they're not like every other girl and to stay on track in the journey toward living as the women God wants them to be, toward finding their value in Jesus" (p. 7). Society pushes young girls to find self-worth by comparing themselves to others and says that Christianity suppresses values they should uphold and believe in if they were truly feminists and believed in the power of women.

Youth-focused third wave feminism corrupted the idea of women's rights and formed it into a philosophy promoting sexual promiscuity as political and social freedom (Tarrant, 2008, p. 1). However, true feminism, the philosophy that upholds feminine qualities in women and does not try to "subjugate women as either caricatured, soulless sex objects or defeminized pseudo-males" (Pixler, 2011, p. 3) shows modesty as the gift it is. As Pixler (2011) states, "modesty empowers women, and women empower the world" (p. 4)

APPLICATION

Conference Plan

The all-girls youth conference and fashion show is derived from the importance and impact of an adolescent's view of her outward beauty. It recognizes that it is not enough for girls to hear the simple statement, "it's what's on the inside that counts," because, while true, it dismisses the fact that the majority of adolescent girls build their self-esteem and self-image on their own perceptions of their outward beauty. The truth remains that many of them need to feel that they are attractive both outwardly and inwardly, and therefore, both areas should be addressed. The following conference plan details the steps taken to begin an adolescent girl's journey toward a self-loving existence based on these ideals.

A. Elements

Youth Conference

The world today is persuasive and manipulative, twisting truth and presenting sexualized lies as fact. Adolescent girls, who are just developing their self-image, can be caught up within the flashy lies and view them as absolute reality unless they can be reached and shown the truth. The sooner adolescent girls see their real beauty and real worth, the more likely these will stay with them well past adolescence. The truth can only add value to their lives.

Eden is a citywide youth conference designed specifically to reach adolescent girls before the stylized images of the media have a chance to. It will strive to reinforce the idea that it is possible to be beautiful and trendy without showing excess skin, and that inner beauty is not dependent on the standards the world provides, but on the standards that God provides.

The conference will be an evening long event ending with the fashion show, and will be made up of four twenty-minute long sessions. Each session will cover topics focused on discovering each girl's true self, showing each girl how to dress for her body type and personality, introducing each girl to, and teaching her how to become like, the Biblical representation of women, and addressing the lies and truths about God and his love. An enrollment cost will cover the cost of a t-shirt.

After each session, the girls will break up into small groups of five to ten, depending on the number of volunteer college-age or adult leaders. If at all possible, these leaders will be individuals who work with the local youth groups, individuals the girls already know and trust. This allows the girls in attendance a sense of stability and familiarity within the groups, which will in turn allow for more meaningful discussions. The groups will participate in interactive games designed to reinforce the information presented during the lesson, and discuss how the girls can apply the truths they learned to their everyday lives. Questions designed to lead the groups into a deeper and more thorough discussions will be provided, but the leaders will be given the ability to lead the group in any related direction.

Fashion Show

Clothing is a public and visible display of a person's inner self, reflecting how a girl measures her value and her worth. Style should reflect her real self: her character and individuality. True style captivates because it captures a bit of someone's spirit and intrigues others about the rest. In a culture so saturated with sexual images and skimpy clothing, however, it is difficult for a girl to see who she is. She only sees what society says she should be.

The fashion show is designed to encourage girls to feel beautiful and learn to value their own unique appearance without feeling obligated to wear skimpy clothing. Fashion shows are seen as the pinnacle of high fashion, showing off the most stylish clothing. When a girl can actually participate as a model in the show, when she sees the potential she holds within herself, she is more likely to believe she can be beautiful rather than a sexual object. This show seeks to restore feminine strength without promoting promiscuity or masculinity and to remind the female population what it seems to have forgotten: that true feminism doesn't degrade womanhood, but upholds it.

The show will directly follow the youth conference, bringing together girls from the surrounding areas. Each girl will wear her t-shirt, provided to her at the beginning of the conference, and a flower boa. Her small group leader will bring her favorite outfit to model, allowing each girl to realize that even today, modesty is possible. This fashion show is created to show each girl her own individual beauty, a truth that will hopefully stay with her long after the show.

B. Theme and Style

The Eden Project draws from the Garden of Eden, mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2, where individuals lived in a beautiful, green world in fellowship with God himself. It was a place of peace and serenity where a girl could be her true self without fear of rejection or failure. This conference seeks to draw from these feelings, and ideally recreate them, if only for one day.

Nature is God's first creation. He formed the world first, void of any manmade structures, and placed His own personality and beauty into each flower, each tree, and each blade of grass. By drawing from nature, The Eden Project hopes to draw from God's original

designs to reinforce the values he wanted to instill in us from the very beginning. He did not make humankind so we could be ashamed of ourselves; rather he created us to be a reflection of Him. This is the very foundation of the Eden Project

Nature also symbolizes growth: nothing in nature is stagnant. The Eden Project will pull from this idea as well. It is hoped that by attending the conference, adolescent girls will become more confident about their true identities and grow in the knowledge of God's love for them. It's intended to help the girls become aware of who they can be and give them the confidence to believe in this truth even after the conference has finished.

The Eden Project is designed to be similar to a large garden party and picnic, pulling from an almost literal interpretation of the Garden of Eden. Flowers and trees will be the main focus of the decorations, and the color green will be used as a theme color. This event is designed to be a casual, beautiful and educational experience for the girls in attendance, full of energy and excitement.

C. Guests, Invitations and Arrival

Adolescent girls between the ages 11 and 14, or fifth grade to eighth grade, from all area youth groups will be invited to attend this conference. This event is expected to generate anywhere from 50 to 70 girls and at least 20 volunteers, a number which our location is more than capable of holding. The girls will be allowed, and even encouraged, to bring a guest, but these girls will not be asked to complete the survey because of consent issues.

Registration forms will be given to each local church at least three weeks before the event. Each package will be covered by the Eden Project logo, and will include a promotional poster, postcards, and pamphlets. Girls interested in the event will be given a registration form

to fill out and return to her youth pastor or bring to the event itself, or they will register online on the official Eden Project website.

See **Appendix C** for the promotional materials.

Parents will drop the girls off at the south entrance. The girls will then walk down the sidewalk and through hanging steamers and flower garlands to the entrance. Here the girls will be greeted by the registration table volunteers, given their t-shirts and asked to sign in.

D. Event Timeline

12:00 p.m. Arrive at College Church of the Nazarene, North Campus with decorations and unload

12:30 p.m. Begin decorating. *Specific decorating directions included in the **Decorations** section.*

1:00 p.m. Volunteers arrive to set-up runway. Nicole will supervise.

1:30 p.m. Audio/Visual/Lighting crew arrives for setup and checks, meets with Nicole to answer questions, address any problems.

Volunteers continue decorating in specified locations.

3:00 p.m. Set up registration table, front entrance. *Specific directions included in the **Decorations** section.*

5:00 p.m. Dinners arrive from Subway, frozen yogurt and toppings arrive. Everything is placed in the freezers/refrigerators in the kitchen.

Student photographer and videographer arrive and begin setup/preparations.

Verify arrival with Nicole.

5:45 p.m. Girls begin to arrive. After completing initial registration and picking up a T-Shirt, are directed to café to complete survey. Once completed, are then directed to gym to enjoy activities. *For a detailed list of activities, see **Activities** section.*

During this time, a simple PowerPoint of interesting facts and conversation topics will appear on giant screens.

6:15 p.m. Conference Begins. Girls enter gym through left side doors and take seats with small groups on picnic blankets. The girls receive dinner in picnic baskets and eats with small group. Nicole welcomes girls.

6:30 p.m. Session One begins. *For a detailed list of session topics, please see **Sessions** section.*

6:50 p.m. Session One ends. Girls break up into small groups and find location to spread out blankets and meet. Supplies for the small group activity will be provided in the group's basket.

Group Session One begins.

7:10 p.m. Group Session One ends. Attention is drawn back to runway.

Session Two begins.

7:30 p.m. Session Two ends. Girls break up into small groups and meet in group location in gym. Supplies for the small group activity will be provided in the group's

basket.

Group Session Two begins.

7:50 p.m. Group Session Two ends. Attention is drawn back to runway.

Session Three begins.

8:10 p.m. Session Three ends. Girls break up into small groups and meet in group location in gym. Supplies for the small group activity will be provided in the group's basket.

Group Session Three begins.

Supplies for the Frozen Yogurt Bar will be removed from the freezers in the kitchen will be set up in the café.

8:30 p.m. Frozen Yogurt and Toppings bar begins. Girls leave gym and enter café to build their own frozen yogurt sundae. During this time, the girls will fellowship with other participants.

9:00 p.m. Frozen Yogurt and Toppings bar ends.

Session Four begins. Girls return to gym. Attention is brought back to runway.

9:20 p.m. Session Four ends. Girls break up into small groups and meet in group location in gym. Supplies for the small group activity will be provided in the group's basket.

Group Session Four begins.

9:40 p.m. Girls are given free time. They can participate in a multitude of activities. *For a detailed list of activities, see **Activities** section.*

During this time, a simple PowerPoint of interesting facts and conversation topics will appear on giant screens.

10:00 p.m. Free time ends, girls meet with small group leaders to create group runway pose and play with hair techniques. Small group leaders dress in the outfit they brought to model.

10:15 p.m. Doors open for parents. Guest arrive.

Girls begin to move to backstage behind gym and line up.

10:25 p.m. Guests take seats.

Girls line up backstage according to instructions.

10:30 p.m. Fashion Show begins.

Any take down outside of gym begins—includes café, gym and registration table.

11:00 p.m. Fashion Show ends.

Girls take exit survey and leave.

Take down of Fashion Show begins.

12:00 p.m. Take down of Fashion Show ends. Volunteers leave.

E. Room Set-up

Entry way

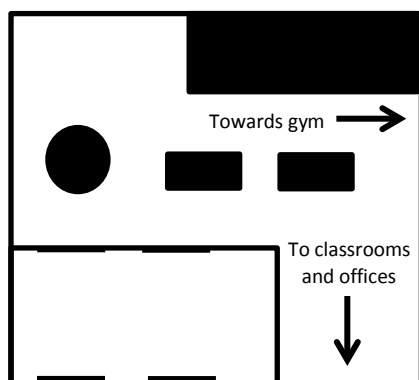


Figure 1. Entry Way

A round high table will be set up in the entryway facing the doors. The girls will be able to stop at the table to register, as well as pick up a pen and an entrance survey. They will then be directed along the hallway towards the gym to complete the survey and pick up their t-shirt. See

Figure 1 for details.

Gym

The girls will spend the majority of their time in the gym. The runway will be set up prior to the event and will be used as a teaching location for the youth pastor. The existing stage will be extended by four risers provided by College Church of the Nazarene. The cushioned chairs already at North Campus will be set up around the

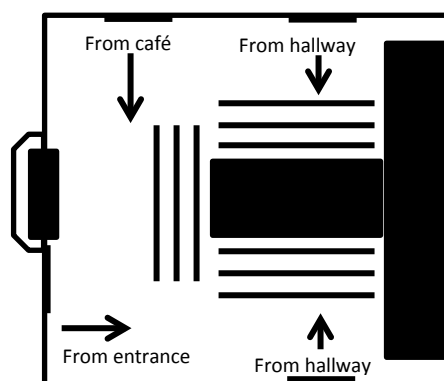


Figure 2. Gym

runway in such a way that will provide each girl with a view of the stage. The number of chairs will depend on the number of girls in attendance. See **Figure 2** for details.

F. Decorations

Entry way

Each table will be covered in a checkered tablecloth and decorated with baskets of flowers, pens and entrance surveys. Pink and green bunting will be hung over the hallway

entrance, from wall to wall, and will continue towards the gym. Strings of yarn pompoms will be hung in the same manner.

*See **Appendix A** for picture examples of the decorations described above.*

Gym

The gym will be the main activity area. Each doorway will be marked by bouquets of spiraled balloons, creating a fun and whimsical effect. To hide the high corporate ceiling, green and pink glittered mesh will be draped from wall to wall at differing heights. This will give the space a fun, girly feel.

The areas of the gym not covered by the material or balloon bouquets will be left open. Each small group leader will be asked to bring along a blanket, which will serve to recreate a picnic scene and give the girls an area to meet together for deeper discussion. The undecorated parts of the gym will allow room for these moments.

Each small group will be given a picnic basket to be used throughout the conference. Each group will pick up their basket before small group time. The baskets will contain small group questions and supplies they need for each activity following large group time. During dinner, food will also be found within the basket.

*See **Appendix A** for picture examples of the decorations described above.*

Runway

The runway will be set up in the morning, before the event. It will already be decorated and will be used as a teaching platform to continually bring the girls' attention back. As the day progresses, the girls will focus on the runway and their anticipation will grow. This will not only

hold their attention as they learn the important points of the conference, but will also serve to keep their behavior in check.

Risers provided by College Church of the Nazarene will jut out from the existing stage to create the runway. Christmas lights entwined with flower garlands and the same glittered mesh that hangs from the ceiling will line the edges, and green tablecloths will flow down from the stage to the ground, hiding the supports below.

*See **Appendix A** for picture examples of the decorations described above.*

G. Audiovisual/Lighting

Audio and visual will be provided by College Church of the Nazarene. *See **Appendix B** for the Audio/Visual vendor contract.* Needs are as follows:

- Overhead speakers to play music.
- Microphones for teachers and Nicole.
- Use of large screens to welcome girls and play a PowerPoint of interesting facts.
- Overhead lighting in gym during conference sessions.
- Microphone for Fashion Show announcer.
- Spotlighting during Fashion Show.
- Use of video projector during Fashion Show.

H. Guest Speaker

Elizabeth Bjorling has been the Preteen and Junior High Pastor at College Church of the Nazarene in Bourbonnais, IL for the past nine years and is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. She graduated with her BS from ONU in 2002 and her M.A. in Religion in 2007. Before serving at College Church, Elizabeth was a full time Youth and Children's Minister for

two and a half years in Savoy, IL. She has spoken nationally at Girl's Only Conferences for nine years as well as at summer camps, M7, and countless other venues. She read her paper on the Bridal Imagery in Isaiah at the society of Biblical Literature Conference in 2009 and recently had an article published in the fall edition of *Grace and Peace*. She has also published *My World*, the third module of *Wired*, a transitional curriculum specifically designed for preteens by Word Action.

I. Sessions

Because the event was presented in a Christian setting, each session was focused on finding your identity in God, as well as in who each girl is individually. They were meant to parallel the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as told in Genesis 1 and 2. This idea was first presented to the girls on the official Eden Project website in the following blog post written by Nicole Parsons:

I don't know about you, but when I hear the word "chaos," I always feel it is the perfect description of my life. I get so busy and so bogged down with school and homework and work and hanging out with friends and homework and reading and youth group and volunteering and...I mean, you get the idea. And if I were a betting girl (which I promise I'm not) I would probably guess that words like "chaotic" and "crazy" and "busy" describe your life too.

But can you believe that God didn't mean for those words to describe life? God doesn't want us to run around from one activity to the next with no rest. He doesn't want us filling our plates with responsibility after responsibility

with no time left to spend time with Him. His idea was peace, and His ideas are always perfect.

Think about the Garden of Eden found in Genesis 1 and 2. Can you picture it? It's always sunny--not too hot, not too cold--and every now and again, a warm breeze whistles through the perfectly formed, vibrantly green grass. The birds are always singing, perched high in every beautiful tree you can imagine, and the carpet-like ground beneath your feet is covered with the prettiest flowers you'll ever see. There's delicious fruit and veggies (and probably a lot of chocolate--this is the ideal place, after all), and the air smells of perfection.

But that's not the best part of the Garden. Yes, it's visually and physically beautiful, but all that is nothing compared to this: God is there, with Adam and Eve, in perfect fellowship. He's basically best friends with the new humans. They can actually see Him, with their eyes. They can hear Him, with their ears, not just their hearts. They can reach out and touch him, are able to feel him with their hands, not just in their spirits.

This was how God wanted the world to be. This is how He wanted us to live life. But all that was lost when Adam and Eve listened to the Devil himself and decided that their plan--step one: eat the apple, step two: become like God--was better than God's plan for them. And the Devil hasn't given up just because Adam and Eve had to leave the garden. If anything, he's gotten worse. It is his goal in life to force you, and everyone else you've ever met, off the path God has

designed specifically for you, and lead you down a road that ends in nothing but bad things.

He's a sneaky bugger, too. He whispers lies in your ears, but twists the words and makes it sound like the truth. Have you ever heard yourself think phrases like these:

"God can't use me. I'm a failure."

"I'm so ugly."

"No one will ever love me."

"How could I have been so stupid."

"I can't do anything right."

"I don't like myself at all."

And on and on and on.

I want you to know right now that God doesn't want you to think like this. He even says in Isaiah 55:8 that those thoughts are not His thoughts, and those ways are not His ways.

It's time for us to stop believing the lies the Devil tells us. It's time we stand up to him and take our rightful place as daughters of the King. Believe that God has a greater plan for you than you have for yourself. He has a much better place for you than your current situation. God doesn't make junk. God doesn't give us hardship, and He doesn't let us go through more than we can stand. He loves you. He absolutely adores you and He wants you to be with him. Always and Forever.

Because event registration took place primarily on the website, and the girls were consistently reminded to check for new information and updates regarding the program, the post was quite accessible and well read. This gave each attendee a good idea of the program content and what to expect during each session.

Session One

The Garden: Finding God's Purpose for You

To open the event, the first session focused on how God intended individuals to feel about themselves. Humanity was not created for a shameful or self-loathing existence. Instead, individuals were made to see themselves as God sees them, to know that they are beautifully and wonderfully made. God created humanity simply to love it, and he wants his children to love themselves as well. He has a plan and a purpose for each individual, and his plan leads to the peace he originally intended for humanity, rather than the chaos the world brings.

Session Two

Snakes: Lies We're Lead to Believe

The world today is persuasive and manipulative, twisting truth and presenting sexualized lies as fact. Adolescent girls, who are just developing their self-image, can be caught up within the flashy lies and view them as absolute reality unless they can be reached and shown the truth. The sooner adolescent girls see their real beauty and real worth, the more likely these will stay with them well past adolescence. The truth can only add value to their lives, and that is the focus of the second session.

Session Three

The Vines: What Influences You?

The importance with what the girls surround themselves cannot be understated, and the third session was designed to explain how imperative spiritual, emotional and relational growth is. The goal of the Eden Project was to create experiences with God that could continue well after the event ended, and develop a real, personal relationship with Jesus. True beauty is not skin deep, it also shines from within a person: in how she speaks, how she acts, and how she loves others around her.

Session Four

Rebuilding the Wall: Acting like the Flower You Are

Girls today are bombarded with conflicting images and messages about how they should act. They are the daughter of the King, and we want to encourage them to treat themselves and others as such. During this final session, Nicole explained how individuals can determine their body type—pear, ruler, apple and hourglass—and how to dress each. She also explained to the attendees the idea of personal style and beauty that is not determined by other's tastes.

J. Activities

Pre-event

Before the event begins, the girls will be given the opportunity to participate in the follow activities:

1. Each girl who returns a consent form will be given a survey to complete in the entry way before participating in any other activities. These surveys are designed to measure the

success of the conference by showing whether or not their precepts were changed and their self-esteem improved.

2. A fashion trivia game will be set up in the gym, hosted by a College Church volunteer, and by giving the correct answers, the girls will be able to win small flowers as prizes.
3. Girls will be allowed to stay at the café tables or the adjacent sofas for conversation and fellowship.

Large Group Activity

To get the girls up and moving during the event, and thereby promote a somewhat healthy lifestyle, girls will be asked to learn a popular, faster paced dance, choreographed by Haley Meadows, choreographer for Olivet Nazarene University's Color Guard. The girls will dance to One Direction's "What Makes You Beautiful." If all goes well, the girls will perform the dance for their parents as a finale to the fashion show.

K. Menu

Dinner

The girls will enjoy a picnic dinner and will be provided with loaves of white or wheat bread, crunchy or creamy peanut butter, Nutella®, apple slices, dipping caramel and Capri Suns®. Plastic utensils such as forks and knives will also be provided and each girl will be able to create a sandwich to their liking using any or all of the ingredients. The meal will be eaten in small groups on picnic blankets to encourage group communication and relationship development.

Snack

About halfway through the event, the girls will be treated to an ice cream and topping bar. They will be able to choose the type of ice cream—vanilla, chocolate, mint chocolate chip, cookie dough, or cookies and cream. They will receive two scoops of each, and will then be directed to the toppings bar, filled with a variety of fruit, cookies, syrups and candies. The girls will be able to create their own ice cream sundaes using whatever they choose.

L. Fashion Show

The Look

Each leader was provided with a document that outlined tips for figuring out body types and which styles worked with each. Nicole also assigned one of the following categories to them: spring casual, spring formal, summer casual, summer formal, fall casual, fall formal, winter casual, or winter formal. She was asked to bring an outfit with her that met the guidelines for her body shape and fit in the category assigned.

At 10:00 p.m., the small group leaders will be directed to the changing rooms to dress in the outfits they brought. The girls attending the conference will be in the gym during this time, learning how to walk the runway, posing for pictures and dancing to the music. At 10:15 p.m., the girls will meet back up with their small group leaders and will create a unique team pose for the end of the runway. The girls will begin to line up backstage at 10:50 p.m., and the show will begin at 10:30 p.m.

Schedule

The general schedule for a small group will be repeated for each team. What follows is the lineup for a single small group.

1. Small group leader walks out and poses at the end of the runway and waits there. She will be encouraged to do more than one pose to seem less cumbersome while she waits.
2. One by one, each girl in the leader's small group will walk the runway and pose there.
3. Each girl will then walk up the runway and move to stage right, where they will wait with their small group leader.
4. The group will do their team pose, turn around, and leave the runway.

Each small group will follow this lineup. After the group has gone, they will be able to enter the gym through the southwest door and watch the other girls walk the runway.

Finale

After the last group has walked down the runway, Nicole will take the stage and thank the parents for coming, explain the project and what the girls have learned, and thank all the volunteers. During this time, all the girls will move backstage once again to prepare for their final dance. Once Nicole is finished speaking, the girls will come out and line up waiting for the music to begin. They will then perform the dance they learned earlier for their parents.

The girls will then leave the stage and every girl who completed a survey in the morning will be given the exit survey. They will be asked to finish this before they leave and return it to any volunteer.

Limitations

Perhaps the biggest limitation on this project was the availability of time. The major issue during the planning stages was the lack of registrations. The conference was originally scheduled for Saturday, November 10, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., however many churches and youth clubs that had been invited mentioned that this time and day did not work

for their students. After long discussions, the suggestion was made that the conference time and date would be switched from all-day Saturday, to Friday, November 9, 2012 from 6:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. This change removed three hours from the conference plan.

While working on this project, Nicole was also completing the last semester of her coursework, and it was therefore difficult to carve out enough time to meet with those assisting her on the project. As time went on, it became evident that a few changes would have to be made if the conference was to go on. It was decided to remove some content, some decorating visions, and some fashion show details from the overall conference.

The original plan for the conference included clothing donated from local businesses for students and leaders to wear as they walked down the runway. However, because the conference had to be shorted from eight hours to five, the time to change into these outfits had to be removed. Besides that, time to visit these local businesses slowly disappeared as school took a little more precedence, and volunteers to do so were hard to find. Nicole had been advised that she alone should be the ambassador between the event and the companies, and therefore, the endeavor was given up.

The budget for the event also proved to be difficult to work with. Though the Honors Program had granted \$300 for this project, College Church of the Nazarene elected to cover all event expenses up to \$650. The expenses for the Eden Project totaled \$627.42. Of this, \$432.13 was spent to purchase food, enough to feed over 200 people, though only 20 people had actually registered. This oversight wasted much of the event budget, and only afforded \$217.87 to cover the remaining expenses, which included decorations for three large spaces, t-

shirt printing, and teaching materials. Because of this, much of the decorating visions had to be scaled down.

The third largest limitation was the difference in personalities of those planning the event. Two people put a lot of time and effort into making the Eden Project possible, one who had many years of experience in event and conference planning, and another who was working through the process for the first time. This, at times, presented many challenges and differences in opinions to overcome, and caused a lot of heartache and poor communication. It also caused a lot of problems among the volunteers who assisted in decorating, set-up and the event itself, and many did not know whose direction to follow. However, it was important for both to remain professional, and to understand the differences in each other while at the same time putting personal egos on hold, to work together to make the event a success. Though it was not easy, both were able to do so, and very few hurt feelings remain.

Feedback

Before and after the event, the girls were each given the following ten question anonymous survey to be analyzed using a Linkert scale:

1. I act differently around certain people because I want them to like me.
2. I will be made fun of if I show people who I really am.
3. It is more important to act how my friends think I should than to be myself.
4. A person must be thin to be well liked and respected.
5. I like myself.
6. My body type is not my ideal body type.
7. I only feel beautiful when guys notice me.

8. How I act matters to God.

9. God's opinion of me matters to me more than other people's opinion of me.

10. The Bible has information on how girls should act.

Each girl was asked to circle the number between one and five that corresponds best with their personal thoughts or feelings, one being "strongly disagree" and five being "strongly agree." After the event, the results were analyzed to discover what impact, if any, the conference had. **Table 1** details the results. Please note that some questions were designed to display a positive change, and some were designed to display a negative change.

Because of the event's attendance, around 50 girls in total, the data pool was somewhat limited. Most of the girl's came from church youth groups, where they often hear similar messages, and knew how to answer the survey. Perhaps if there had been a wider audience, the survey results would have been different. Many of the questions should have been

Table 1: Entrance and Exit Survey Results Overall						
	Entrance Survey		Exit Survey			
Question No.	Actual	Ideal	Actual	Ideal	+/-	% Change
1	2.59	1.00	1.79	1.00	-	-0.80
2	2.02	1.00	1.94	1.00	-	-0.08
3	1.36	1.00	1.44	1.00	-	0.08
4	1.23	1.00	1.29	1.00	-	0.06
5	4.14	5.00	4.32	5.00	+	0.19
6	2.44	1.00	2.09	1.00	-	-0.35
7	1.91	1.00	2.06	1.00	-	0.15
8	4.52	5.00	4.35	5.00	+	-0.17
9	4.39	5.00	4.41	5.00	+	0.03
10	3.61	5.00	3.88	5.00	+	0.27

reworded to better suit the girls' ages and understandings, and the exit survey should have included a "Comments" section where the girls could have shared their thoughts about the event.

Showing the "True" Self

The largest change occurred in the first question, "I act differently around certain people because I want them to like me." During the entrance survey, 22% of the girls answered with a four or a five, which indicated that they on some level agreed with this statement, 54% answered with a two or a one, indicating that they disagree with this statement somehow, and 23% answered with a three, indicating a neutral or undecided opinion. Because most girls have heard messages concerning this behavior before, these results were not all that surprising.

However, after analyzing the exit survey, it was found that only 6% of the girls in attendance answered this same question with a four or a five, and 79% answered with a one or a two. In other words, 25% of the girls disagreed more with this statement after attending the conference, which was the goal. Much of the content of the event was designed to show the girls that being true to oneself is more important and rewarding than striving to reach the standards set by others.

Recognition of Personal Body Type

Question six, "my body type is not my ideal body type," also produced a large change. During the entrance survey, 20% of the girls answered with a four or a five, which indicated that they on some level agreed with this statement, 51% answered with a two or a one, indicating that they disagree with this statement somehow, and 29% answered with a three, indicating a

neutral or undecided opinion. However, this was a question that should have been reworded in more positive language, and the vocabulary changed to suit the needs of the students.

Again, the exit survey produced some interesting results. It was found that only 15% of the girls in attendance answered this same question with a four or a five, and 62% answered with a one or a two. This indicates that 11% of the girls were able to change their perceptions about their body types or were able to understand the question better after attending the conference. The goal of the fourth session was to describe the beauty of each body type and explain how to balance the body with different styles of clothing, and the results indicate that this was successful for some girls.

Understanding of Biblical Messages

Another fairly significant change occurred in the tenth question, “the Bible has information on how girls should act.” During the entrance survey, 62% of the girls answered with a four or a five, which indicated that they on some level agreed with this statement, 27% answered with a two or a one, indicating that they disagree with this statement somehow, and 11% answered with a three, indicating a neutral or undecided opinion. The average answer, therefore, was a 3.61, as shown in **Table 1**, which was somewhat surprising; the majority of girls came from church backgrounds and, for the most part, answered the other questions as expected.

The exit survey again yielded some interesting results: 68% of the girls in attendance answered this same question with a four or a five, and 21% answered with a one or a two. While these numbers are not necessarily staggering, it does suggest that some attendees were

able to learn more about what the Bible has to say about living life. An average of 3.88 is still better than 3.61, no matter how minute the difference.

Understanding God's View

Some changes were not as hoped. For instance, question eight, "how I act matters to God," produced a negative result instead of a positive. During the entrance survey, 89% of the girls answered with a four or a five, which indicated that they on some level agreed with this statement, 11% answered with a two or a one, indicating that they disagree with this statement somehow. No attendee answered with a three to indicate a neutral or undecided opinion. These results were not at all surprising, given the backgrounds of most of the students.

However, during the exit survey, only 82% of the girls in attendance answered this same question with a four or a five, 12% answered with a one or a two, and 6% answered with a three. This implies that after leaving the conference, some girls were less sure about what the Bible says about their actions, which was not the intention of the event. Perhaps some things were said during the event that caused them to question this, the question was worded incorrectly, or some girls were rushing either during the first or the second survey.

Measuring Beauty by Attention from the Opposite Gender

The other question to yield results other than what was intended was question seven, "I only feel beautiful when guys notice me." During the entrance survey, 21% of the girls answered with a four or a five, which indicated that they on some level agreed with this statement, 72% answered with a two or a one, indicating that they disagree with this statement somehow, and 7% answered with a three, indicating a neutral or undecided opinion. These

results were a little different than expected, though not all that surprising considering their backgrounds.

However, the results of exit survey produced a positive change instead of the negative change hoped for. After analyzing the results, it was found that 15% of the girls in attendance answered this same question with a four or a five, 68% answered with a one or a two, and now 18% of the girls were neutral or undecided. Perhaps they were made more aware of this mentality after attending the event, something was said that would indicate to them that measuring one's beauty by the attention received from the opposite gender was the correct attitude, or they were confused by the question. Regardless, this had not been the hope of the Eden Project.

Reaction from Students and Parents

Overall, the reaction from students and parents was very positive. The girls absolutely loved walking in the fashion show and performing the choreographed dance, and were reluctant to leave. Many of them asked if the event would be offered again next year. Besides that, one group of girls dived in deeper than anyone could have imagined and accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior during the conference.

Many parents went out of their way to speak to Nicole, and mentioned that they were very glad that an event like this had been offered. They also stated that an event like this would have been beneficial for them during their adolescent years, as well. One mother in particular praised the Eden Project long after the conference concluded and said that it was one of the best things her daughters had participated in to date.

CONCLUSION

Many people seem to dismiss the importance of a positive view of one's outward appearance, reminding us that a person's inward beauty is of much more consequence. While this is entirely true—most anyone can describe a person who is outwardly beautiful, but because of their negative attitude or personality, is viewed as ugly—this outlook does not consider that fact that an adolescent's self-worth is more often than not based on how others react to their outward appearance. Society tells them that to be accepted and considered beautiful, they must conform to cultural standards, and this is the problem.

If the issue of outward beauty is overlooked or not addressed, adolescent girls will go on, feeling as though they cannot measure up, and that a beautiful personality is the best that can be said for them. Of course, this should be counted as a positive thing, but because, in many cases, they hear more of the media or negative outlook, it's not. What a person wears on the outside should reflect who she is on the inside, and this indicates she should be able to feel that her appearance is beautiful because it reflects who she is as an individual. Every girl is beautiful and she should be allowed to feel it.

Presenting these ideas in a conference format seemed to have a very positive impact on each girl. In some cases, it provided them with new information on how to dress to enhance their best features, which will make them feel better about their appearance, as well as how to find their identity in something larger and more substantial than other people's opinions. They were able to participate in a fashion show, something other girls only dream about. The event was designed to celebrate individual beauty, to show the girls that each of them is just as beautiful as the woman on the cover of a fashion magazine.

However, the conference was only a five hour event, with a lot of content condensed and presented quickly. If an event like the Eden Project is the only source where girls hear this information, there will be no impact. Girls need to be reminded of their individual beauty on a daily basis. Parents need to understand the importance of developing a positive self-image during the adolescent years and do everything within their power to cultivate it. The outside says so much about a person's inward opinion of herself, others just need be open enough to acknowledge it.

REFLECTION

I was very happy with the overall turnout of the event. All of my worries and stress during the two or three months prior to the event were well worth it, and I could not have been more proud of the turnout. I loved watching the girls get involved in every aspect of the conference, I loved hearing them mention again and again just how much they were enjoying themselves, and I loved watching my vision come to life. My mission in life is to make sure each girl know she's beautiful, and I think this was a great start to fulfilling that calling.

This was the first event I've planned in its entirety, and I learned a lot during the process. I learned the best way to make cold calls and how to accept blatant rejection. I learned how to delegate responsibility among my volunteers, how to allow them their own creativity while also maintaining my vision, and how to handle managing differences. I learned how to work with different types of personalities, when to fight for an aspect of the event and when to simply let it go. Most importantly, I learned that I am capable of such grandeur, and that it's possible to accomplish whatever I put my mind to.

While some were not very excited that we only had about 50 girls in attendance, I counted this as an amazing blessing. The day of the event, we still only had 20 girls actually registered, and I was not anticipating many more than that. Of course, we had enough food for over 200 girls, but I knew that expecting that many when registration was so low would only cause disappointment. I thought the size of the group was rather perfect for the content and the activities, and they all seemed to mesh very well.

Of course, there are quite a few changes I would make if I were to plan this conference again. First and foremost, I would work harder to reach a wider audience. There were many

limitations on my time, but I should've tried to appeal to more girls. Personal visits and messages go much further than simple posters or postcards, and I would have loved to have introduced the program to each youth group individually and personally.

Secondly, I would work harder to communicate better with those planning with me. Lack of communication is so detrimental, and I witnessed that first hand during this project. We should have discussed responsibilities and direction together before we spoke to our volunteers. More often than not, I would give a direction, and it would be changed the moment I left. Had we been on the same page, this could have been avoided.

Finally, I like the idea of an all-day event more than an evening program. The shortened time required that we remove many aspects of the conference that I would have rather kept, and it forced us to condense a lot of the content. If timing requires a change again, I would rather move it to a day where the same amount of time could be allotted, instead of simply shortening the sessions and activities.

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APPENDIX A: PICTURE EXAMPLES

Entry Way



Figure 3: Checkered Table Cloth



Figure 4: Bunting



Figure 5: Baskets of Flowers



Figure 6: Pompom Garlands

Gym



Figure 7: Picnic Baskets



Figure 8: Ceiling Fabric

Runway

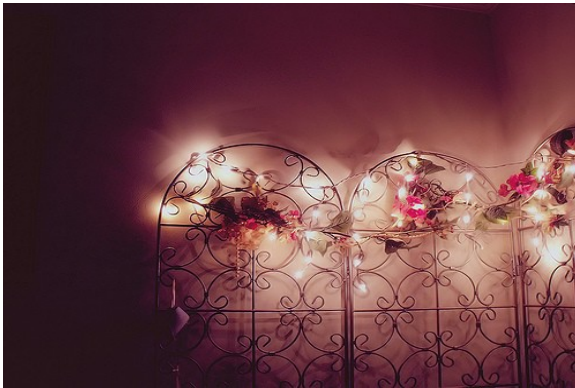


Figure 9: Flowers and lights



Figure 10: Tulle and lights



Figure 11: Stage pillars

APPENDIX B: EVENT PICTURES



Figure 12: Small Group Time



Figure 13: Large Group Time



Figure 14: Dance Instruction



Figure 15: Small Group Pose



Figure 16: Girl on Runway



Figure 17: Small Group Leader on Runway



Figure 18: Girl on Runway

APPENDIX C: PROMOTIONAL PIECES

Event Poster



Event Postcard



Event Pamphlet

Front

Register Now!

Participant Name: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Street Address: _____

Home Church: _____

Age: _____ Phone: (____) _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Early Bird Registration Until Oct. 13, 2012

\$25-Groups 5, \$30-Individuals

Return this form with payment to your youth leader or mail to Elizabeth Blything,
% College Church of the Nazarene, 200 University Ave., Bartonoma, IL 60914



Schedule

9:00am	Doors Open
10:00am	Conference Begins
10:30am	Session One
11:00am	Small Group One
11:25am	Session Two
11:50am	Small Group Two
12:10pm	Large Group Activity
12:30pm	Lunch Time
12:50pm	Session Three
1:20pm	Small Group Three
1:45pm	Session Four
2:15pm	Small Group Four
2:30pm	Large Group Activity
3:00pm	Fashion Show Preparations
3:30pm	Doors Open to Parents/Guests
4:00pm	Fashion Show Begins
5:00pm	End of Fashion Show Conference Ends

www.ExperienceTheEdenProject.weebly.com



The Eden Project

Because in Eden,
they felt no shame.
Genesis 2:22



Girl's Only
Conference and
Fashion Show

For 5th-
8th Grade
Girls!

November 10, 2012

College Church of the Nazarene, North Campus

837 W. 6000 N. Road, Bartonoma, IL 60914

(815) 933-7749, ext 242

[Back](#)

Peace within the Chaos

The conference will be a day-long event ending with the fashion show, known as The Gardens! Besides four amazing large group sessions, taught by Pastor Elizabeth Bjorkling of College Church, girls will be able to meet in smaller groups with adult volunteers from their very own churches! Fun, food, dancing, and a catwalk. Really, what more could a girl ask for?

Conference Topics

- The Garden: Finding God's Purpose for You
- Snakes: Lies We're Led to Believe
- Rebuilding the Wall: Acting Like the Flower You Are
- The Vines: What Influences You?

Extra Things*

- Learn how to dress for your body type!
- Learn a dance routine!
- Walk the catwalk in the Fashion Show!

Pricing Info!

	Group 5+	Individuals
Early Bird Until Oct. 13	\$25	\$30
Regular Until Nov. 7	\$30	\$35
At the Door After Nov. 7	\$35	\$40

Includes lunch, two snacks and a t-shirt!

Register online or by mail!

Hosted by:

**College Church of the Nazarene
North Campus**

897 W. 6000 N. Road
Bourbonnais, IL 60914

I voluntarily give my consent for my child to participate in the research titled, "The Eden Project," conducted by ONU Haven Seeker/Nicole Parsons. I am my child's parent/guardian and I understand that my child may be photographed exclusively for the purpose of Nicole Parsons' Haven Research Project.

The reason for the research is to investigate and create programs to improve self-esteem and body image in adolescent girls. The benefits that my child may receive are an increased self-esteem, a more positive attitude, and an increased ability to resist peer pressure and negative influences. The results of the research will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of myself and my child, unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will answer my further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by phone at (815) 300-1182.

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

I understand that my parents have given me permission to participate in The Eden Project, ONU Haven's Research Project by Nicole Parsons. I will be asked to take optional anonymous entrance and exit surveys of my opinions during the conference and do not have to take those if I choose not to without any repercussions.

Student Signature: _____

Website: www.ExperienceTheEdenProject.weebly.com

The Eden Project
(815) 922-7749 ext. 142

[Welcome!](#)
[About Us](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[The Conference](#)
[Details and Registration](#)
[Stay In the Know](#)

Register Now!

The Gardens

About the Conference

Elizabeth Bjorling
primary instructor
event coordinator

What is your favorite flavor?

☐ Root
☐ Caramel
☐ Mint
☐ Vanilla
☐ Strawberry
☐ Lemon
☐ Other:

Vote

[View Results PollDaddy.com](#)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

About the Conference!

Nicole Parsons, as part as her requirements for the CHS Honors Program, has created the conference and fashion show as a way to increase body image and self-esteem in middle school aged girls, where they are just starting to define their identity.

The conference will be a day-long event ending with the fashion show, known as The Gardens, and will be made up of four hour-long sessions. Each session will cover topics focused on discovering each girl's true self, showing each girl how to dress for her body type and personality, introducing each girl to, and teaching her how to become like, the Biblical representation of women, and addressing the lies and truths about God and His love.

HONORS PROJECT

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Shirt Design

