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## Pre-teen girls hear message of self-respect, fitting in

Students, mothers attend conference

By Jane Clifford  
STAFF WRITER

July 20, 2008

POINT LOMA – It's no easy task to quiet a room filled with 200-plus pre-teen girls, but Courtney Macavinta did so by asking them to finish a sentence: "One thing you can't tell about me from how I look is . . ."

The 33-year-old author of "Respect" and founder of the site respectrx.com then told them they probably couldn't tell by looking at her that, when she was growing up, her parents went through a bitter divorce, her father was in and out of jail and there was drug and alcohol addiction in the family.

"All I wanted to be was popular," she said softly.

"Pretty, Hot and Popular" was the title of the workshop yesterday at Liberty Station.

There was talk of body image, gossip, fitting in and more of what haunts this age group.

The Jenna Druck Foundation, which runs an annual Young Women's Leadership Conference for high school students, is expanding its mission with this pilot program.

"We want to reach girls at a time when they are arriving at a crossroads in their development," said Ken Druck, who created the foundation in honor of his daughter, who was killed in a bus accident while studying abroad. "This is such an opportune time to deal with the fear, anxieties and challenges of growing up as a girl."

Jess Weiner told the girls she hasn't forgotten what it was like to be where they are.

"My name is Wee-ner," said the author and global ambassador for the Dove Self-Esteem Fund. "All I heard, all day, every day, were wiener jokes."

The girls laughed, and the 34-year-old columnist for *Seventeen* magazine and author of "A Very Hungry Girl" told her story of hungering to be someone else: How she went on a diet at 11 with her mom. By 14, she was anorexic, bulimic and a binge eater.

**Online:** For more information about the Jenna Druck Foundation and upcoming workshops for girls, call (619) 294-8000 or go to [jennadruck.org](http://jennadruck.org)

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By college, she had an epiphany during a counseling session when she heard the "perfect" girls in her group talk of their suffering and how it had to stop, at least for her.

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She challenged her audience to think about how, deep down, all anyone wants is to be loved and successful.

"As girls, we're used to hearing what everyone thinks we should do," she said, walking from table to table, 400-plus eyes following her.

"Listen to yourself," she said, urging them to become "actionists" – doing something every day to improve their lives and the lives of other girls.

"It's a good reality check," said Diana Tan of Mira Mesa, whose 11-year-old daughter, Hannah, was in the audience. "She hears these things from me, but I wanted her to hear them from others."

Mary Tibiatowski wanted the same for two young Serra Mesa girls she signed up for the workshop, adding that it was good for her to be reminded of issues that still affect many adult women.

"I would have appreciated, as a girl, coming to something like this," said Tisha Tyler of Spring Valley, whose 14-year-old stepdaughter, Jenesis Hayes, attended the workshop.

"I took tons of notes," Tyler said, to share with her 12-year-old daughter, Nishon, who couldn't be there.

Before the morning was over and everyone headed outside for ice cream and mingling with new friends, Weiner told the girls to write down the ending to the sentence, "I am beautiful because . . ."

Seeing some of the girls hesitate, she told them, "You don't have to figure it all out today.

"But you can start today."

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