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In the past four months of my life, ELI has left an indelible mark on my heart and mind. Last January I arrived at the orientation with a vague notion of leadership and what it was to me at the time. As the semester comes to a close, I am left with the feeling that I have finally come into my own shoes, discovering the things that are important to me and those that are not. I have found my personal leadership style, and I now pay attention to the leaders I come across each day. For this reason, ELI has been both an enlightening and inspiring experience, for I am surrounded daily by peers, mentors, and the program director, all of whom are leaders with creative visions of their own.

At the beginning of the semester, my project goal was to organize a program about emotional and verbal abuse that would be welcomed into area high schools. I wanted the program to include speakers who could share their personal experiences in emotionally destructive relationships in order for the message to really "hit home," and others who could share possible strategies for encouraging and supporting daughters, sisters, friends, and neighbors who are in emotionally abusive relationships. I chose this topic because I feel it meets a true community need; too many young people, girls in particular, are falling prey to abusive relationships. The effects are far-reaching, and the loss of self-esteem that so often occurs leaves invisible scars. I also feel that emotional abuse among young girls in dating relationships is far too often ignored, and when it is recognized, many people do not know how to help the young girls deal with it in an effective manner.

Since I really did not have any close ties to area high schools, my program, "The Wounds of Words," was held on the campus of the University of Kentucky. Three

women spoke; one was a specialist on dating and domestic violence, and the other two were survivors of emotionally and physically abusive relationships. Approximately forty to fifty people attended the program; some came out of concern for loved ones, others came out of concern for themselves. Regardless of their reasons for coming, I knew as I listened to the speakers and their courageous stories that if one girl could be saved from the emotional abuse that may await her in the future because of my program, the night was a success.

I left my program that night more resolved than ever that I was going to continue working with women's issues; I feel that it is my place as a young woman, as a young leader, to help someone else see the beauty in herself. I am now thinking of obtaining a minor in Women's Studies at UK and am already thinking of innovative ideas for the program that I will do next year. I would like to visit the high schools with "The Wounds of Words," and I am going to try to get a small group of college girls from UK to speak about their experiences in emotionally abusive relationships.

As a result of my experience, I have learned a great deal about leadership. It requires flexibility, persistence, and a vision that seems so real to the dreamer that there is no choice but to give it life. Most importantly, I have learned a lot about myself and what I aspire to do with this single life that I have been given. I am going to touch as many other lives as I possibly can. By nature, I do too many things and have difficulty committing myself to a select few. I realized this semester that quality is so much more important in life than quantity, and the moments we spend leading others to find their own personal definitions of happiness are worth so much more than ours alone. Sometimes to see the beauty and meaning in the small things, we must rid ourselves of all

the "fluff" that threatens to distract us. Time is too precious and our gifts, as leaders, too valuable to be wasted on things that do not touch our hearts.

For information please visit these sites:

www.myndtalk.org/htm/abuse.htm

www.womanabuseprevention.com/html/emotional_abuse.html