



Photo by Jermaine Caldwell

A Wall of Weighted Words

UNC's Residence Hall Association constructs a project that preaches against the use of oppressive language

By Jermaine Caldwell

It was the life-size representation of taking purveyors of oppressive and hateful language and washing their mouths clean with soap.

The symbolic "mouth" was a large-scale rectangular wall that stood for a week in the crossway of Davis Library and the Pit, displaying words like "dyke" and "bitch." The "soap" was a ceremony that draped blue and white sheets over the offensive words and replaced them with positives like "acceptance" and "diversity." The entire project was titled Writing on the Wall.

The project was a weeklong event that ended the Residence Hall Association's Diversity Daze – a compilation of diversity awareness programs. The wall was also sponsored by Amnesty International, the Newman Catholic Student Center Parish, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender - Straight Alliance, and the Academic Enhancement program.

At the culminating ceremony held April 2, this year's RHA President Kristin Conte said, "This

wall proves that words really do hurt," playing off the "sticks and stones" adage.

Students and passers-by had been taking in the heavy words of oppression since the wall went up on March 29, when 288 empty rectangles were cast upon a plywood wall – tempting people to search their mental skies for the dark language they've encountered in the past. Curious but hesitant participants picked up paintbrushes and began scrawling words like "faggot," "bitch," "nigger," "gimp" and "dirty spic" and phrases like "Raped women are asking for it" and "That's so gay."

Eventually organizers saw the need for more wall space and added two more panels, bringing the total to 432 spaces. Some phrases took up more than two panels, but the 400-plus offensive terms effected emotion as phrases like "Ghetto = Dumb" caused onlookers to pause in contemplation.

"I'm surprised," said Sharmain Phillips, a junior political science and economics double major.

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