Change by Shock Value?

A new activist group on campus, New Directions, along with the Richmond and Westhampton College Dean's offices, has paired a media seminar with new film criticizing sexual orientation. National homosexual support groups created the films in an attempt to educate students about sexual diversity issues.

"I think the films are helpful in raising awareness but the manner in which they are put across is offensive," said Lee Hirsburn, Westhampton College coordinator of student life and staff advisor for New Directions.

However, these films attempt to achieve their ends by taking stereotypes about gays and nonheterosexuals and turning them around on heterosexuals. One could take these films as insinuating that heterosexuals are weak-willed, easily influenced, sexually insecure, unstable and distrustful. Is it right to use these tactics simply because gays are discriminated against? One film, titled "Heterosexual Quiz," implies it is not safe to expose children to heterosexual teachers because "The great majority of child molesters are heterosexual."

W.E.L.L. speaker and gay/lesbian issues line officer prompted a group of students to begin New Directions. The group's goal is to increase awareness of sexual diversity issues and change campus culture. The group is for straight, gay and bisexual students, group member Walter Cook said.

And while the group's objectives are valid, its methods may be questioned. Hirsburn and Cook said the goal is not to be abrasive or confrontational, but by pushing them without any explanation, the question on the films must be taken as they are. And with no explanation as to the source or intent of the films, they become confrontational because of their impassioned nature.

If "heterosexual" were substituted for every reference of "heterosexual," nothing would work. Campus organizations would protest. The College would move some of its to the entire administration would be fired.

W.E.L.L. does a different standard exist? The Heterosexual Quiz takes common stereotypes of homosexuals and turns them around. It asks questions such as:

- "What did you decide you were heterosexual?"
- "What did you have to do to become heterosexual?"
- "Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers, coaches and student leaders? Why?"
- "Why do you insist on being so obvious about your sexuality? Can't you not be what you are?"

If the gay community wishes to dispel these stereotypes, why are they being perpetuated in this manner? Is it acceptable to ask these questions of heterosexuals even though the gay community would be outraged if the same questions were asked of it? Again, the sense of a double standard arises.

Diversity in action and thought is a commendable goal. However, the methods used to achieve these goals must be tactful. By attempting to achieve diversity through shock value, a disservice has occurred.