

# About New York

Love in a Very Small Place

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There is a style of young love in this city that has a couple set itself apart in a crowd — a tactile, eye-contact kind of love indulged as the world glances past on the larger business of society. A case of this could be observed last Thursday in the waiting room of an abortion clinic on Queens Boulevard.

The surprising sight as the daily quota of 35 patients gather at the clinic, which is called Choices, is the number of males present with the women signing up for the five-hour, walk-in, walk-out abortions. The young-love male is mustachioed and in denim and he keeps his arm across the shoulders of a curly-haired woman. They share a downward look and he keeps talking slowly and softly to her, as if in seduction.

There are several other men waiting, two wearing windbreakers, most having the look of four decades of wear and tear with too much going on in their lives. Many of the women have the same vaguely yoked look. There are a few mother-daughter couples in the room, and one particularly young-looking teen-age girl works a crossword until it's time for her abortion.

Merle Hoffman, the director of the clinic, says that sometimes in the recovery room when the women are shedding the tension and realizing they are no longer pregnant, there is banter that gets to the subject of men and their germinator's role. And one woman will loudly vow celibacy, and others will laugh.

Outside, meanwhile, there is impatience and anxiety among the males left waiting while the woman go through abortion. One man is pacing determinedly in the exterior corridor as if this were a maternity ward. During these waits, a man will sometimes call over one of the clinic workers and quietly inquire, for curiosity, if the sex of the fetus can be determined.

"Ah, macho," Miss Hoffman says tolerantly. She is too wise to editorialize about other women's relationships. Besides, she occasionally sees a male sign up for a vasectomy at Choices, using the same operating room and looking just as "beautiful and vulnerable" as the women do.

Abortion was legalized in this state eight years ago, and now, whatever the extent of lingering controversy, it is part of the city's daily routine. Choices is a one-stop clinic that performs over 100 abortions a week, at \$175 for a first-trimester operation. The women enter off the lobby of a plain office building and fill the waiting room by 3:30. They fill out forms, take blood and urine tests, are interviewed, have the abortion, and recover for a few hours, in bed if necessary, in a pleasant room of warm colors, plush toys and hot coffee.

They are done by 9 o'clock at night. Some take the IND subway home alone, up the block at the 63d Drive station. Others are escorted by the waiting males. This routine happens 5,000 times a year.

"The important thing is to make the

women feel powerful, not walking out with their heads down, their system screwed up," Miss Hoffman, a 32-year-old psychologist says.

From this point of view, then, the important step at Choices may not be in using the latest vacuum machinery in the two brilliantly lighted operating rooms, as much as in taking the "facilitator's" step. This is the initial interview by a counselor ("facilitator") in one of six private rooms furnished in plush chairs, soft lights and warm tones, with perhaps a Miro poster on one wall or a woman's lib poster depicting Ms. Liberty with a tear in her eye in sympathy with the abortion struggle. There is no desk, by Miss Hoffman's design, in order to reduce the sense of authority figure and patient vulnerability.

Just so, Miss Hoffman has worked at other little touches: Instead of the usual gaping hospital gown, a patient wears a smart slipover of Navy blue. And gynecologists use a preheated speculum in their examinations to counter any sense of shock and invasion. Miss Hoffman's idea is to give a clearer sense of control to the patient, including, she says, an extensive description of the process of abortion.

When abortion was legalized, there was a great deal of political enthusiasm and expertise available after the struggle, but the actual look of an abortion clinic was an unknown, largely left to women, Miss Hoffman says. Having to shape the style and practices of the clinics has been an advantage, she feels, in which the women's liberation movement can help wrest control of medical-care methods from authoritarian professionals, affecting life far beyond the abortion issue.

On Thursday, one of the facilitators, Helen Schecterson, pauses at her station to describe this average day.

"They range from 14 years to 42 years," she says. "Most are married and have kids, and they've talked this over with their husbands. There's tension at first because of the old connotations. I try to relax them."

Miss Hoffman has seen women who treat abortion casually as contraception, and others who experience it as a cosmic event changing their life, and girls as young as 11, following parental dictates or trying to skirt them. For any of them, she says, it can never be easy, even if it is legal.

It hardly looks easy for the women gathered for the Thursday abortion session. They seem individuals, to say the least, and they seem to wait alone, even if there is a male hanging on nearby in the name of love or obligation. From a state of reproduction on arrival, the women leave five hours later in heightened solitude. They go back out to Queens Boulevard and the city, themselves alone again.

REMEMBER THE NEEDLE!