

Freak Culture at Open City

anon.

1971

A couple of weeks ago I went to the Open City Health Clinic for the first time to see a gynecologist. I was a little nervous, but glad that Open City was there for people like me who have no money. I was excited about getting medical care in a comfortable place, rather than some: doctor's sterile waiting room, and with people who are part of a new culture. People who are trying to create alternative institutions like the clinic, places that are free, that are staffed by people who are concerned for others, and who give concrete aid—places where all kinds of people can come together to talk, and not be as separated from each other as we usually are.

But, in the three hours that I waited to see a doctor, I became increasingly freaked-out by what was going on all around me. SEXISM!

The guy who took names at the desk teased. "What are you—another pregnant chick?" He was trying to be nice, but obviously had no sensitivity about how a woman feels, especially if she might be pregnant.

Next to me, on the telephone, one "dude" was talking to his "chick." called her three times while I was there to assure her he was coming to see her, making ridiculing faces to a male friend all the while. "She can't stand it when I go anywhere," he announced when he hung up, obviously resenting this clinging, yet digging the power her dependence gave him.

Then there was the astrologist who was rapping about signs and organic foods at two young girls. "I could tell you were a Virgo. I'm always attracted to Virgos," he would say. He told them all kinds of groovy stories about astrology, and his life, and what great shape his body is in. His "macho" was of the' hip, cool, low-voiced, stare-you-in-the-eye type. Being ignored the couple of times they dared to speak, the girls gave up, obviously not able to match his "togetherness."

It felt weird because I was watching a living stereotype! I kept trying to believe this kind of scene was no longer typical in the new culture. My thoughts were interrupted by a screamed-out discussion:

Man 1: There is only one thing worse than male chauvinism and that's female chauvinism. I know a chick who's such a chauvinist, it drives me crazy!

Man 2: (walking by, in authoritative tone) "Chauvinism of any kind is NOT to be tolerated!"

Man 1: "Aw shut up. You're the biggest chauvinist that ever lived."

Man 2: "Well, I know (chortle, chortle) but at least I can't tolerate myself. (more laughs)"

At this point I was getting really angry and looked around, wondering if I could get any support in confronting some of these people. While I was thinking about them, I overheard another conversation which left me feeling defeated and immobile.

An angry woman approached the man sitting next to me and said, "Hey. you oughta go by and see Jane. You really fucked her over and when you left she got strung out on smack."

He kinda shrugged. "it ain't my fault—I ain't gonna see her."

After starting out so strong, the woman became afraid of the confrontation she was in the middle of and did a sudden change-over. "Yeh, I'm sorry. But listen, why don't you come around and see me? (very sensually) I still love ya', you know."

Wow, it blew my mind! He had so much control over her that he made her feel guilty for telling him the truth. And then accepted her apology, along with her offer of herself.

I couldn't handle it. I started flashing on women's faces and bodies, and they seemed so beautiful, but still, men are so powerful. They have these weird self-concepts that make them say shit like: "Yeh, this chick used to hang on me all the time, but I couldn't dig it...she was strung out. Man, she was a drag!"

I'm confused. A lot of people down there at the Open City Clinic saw themselves as part of the "new culture." Yet they were dominated by the same sexism, self-hatred, individualism, lack of concern, and communication that typifies the old culture they think they have escaped from.

There's a real need for places like the Open City Clinic. But if Open City is seriously trying to build the "new culture," it has to do more than help peoples' bodies. It has to help their heads. It must bring people together, not divide men from women, and freaks and street people from others, It has to be sensitive to the needs of its own neighborhood, especially black people, poor white people, old people, as well as young freaks and students. A new culture clinic has to offer love and warmth and the feeling that someone cares. It has to be a foreshadowing of what a revolution can create, or people will not struggle to keep it going, and to keep on building.

fifth Estate

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