

NEW YORK UP CLOSE

Stroke and Scram

ON Saturday, Dec. 16, three actresses in their 20s ventured out to Herald Square with a video camera and a surreptitious mission: to approach unsuspecting pedestrians from behind and gently stroke their hair without their knowledge. They filmed one another's efforts, which for the most part succeeded in failing to attract notice from various hair pettees, bar a few suspicious looks.

A few weeks later, having edited the video and set it to a kind of funky elevator music, the women posted it on YouTube, the Internet video site. Since then, the Hair Petting Game, as it is called, has been viewed nearly 25,000 times on YouTube, and thousands more times through links. The reaction has not been mild.

"Worst video ever," someone called TheRealWilliamBailey wrote on YouTube, an opinion repeated in various forms by many others. "You should play in traffic."

Some watched the video and called it harmless, even joyful, though such comments were in a distinct minority. "I want to be indignant about how awful this is, too. I really do," wrote Caroline, a user on Gothamist.com, one of the first sites to link to the Hair Petting Game. "However, I am sitting in my office laughing hysterically at this video. Am I an idiot, too? Maybe."

Several commentators wondered whether such touching might technically constitute assault. Rachel Barkow, a professor of criminal and administrative law at New York University School of Law, said, however,



Images from Hairpetting.com

that legal claims over hair petting would probably not go far.

"Most of the cases would involve more significant touching than that, or more serious misconduct," she said. "That's the kind of thing I could see easily being thrown out."

As for the creators of the Hair Petting Game, they shrug off the anger their project has generated.

"No one's going to like everything," said Angelique

Cabral, who came up with the idea at a party a year ago. "We've had 40,000 views at this point, and we've had 40 bad comments. So we kind of take it with a grain of salt."

Ms. Cabral, whose résumé lists appearances in several commercials and the soap operas "The Guiding Light," "All My Children," and "One Life to Live," met her co-conspirators in an acting class. Together, they also run a production company called BadGirl Productions, which is primarily concerned with creating

projects that highlight women's issues, including a play about the effects of the Rockefeller drug laws and incarceration on a mother-daughter relationship.

Their hair-petting efforts, though, will go on — as far as the Conan O'Brien show, they hope. Emily Grace, one of the petters, would love to tousle the host's hair.

"That beautiful red mane, are you kidding?" she asked. "It'd be worth, like, a million points."

JEFF VANDAM

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