

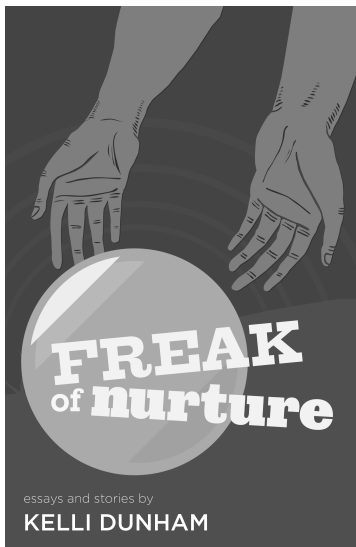
ABOUT KELLI DUNHAM

Kelli Dunham is the genderqueer nurse-comic-author-ex-nun hybrid so common in modern Brooklyn. Kelli is the author of five books of humorous nonfiction, including *Freak of Nurture*, a collection of essays published by Topside Press which caused award-winning author Barbara Carellas to give Kelli the moniker “the David Sedaris of the queer dyke world.”

Kelli was one of Velvet Park Magazine’s *25 Significant Queers of 2011*, was named to the 2012 Campus Pride Hotlist and has appeared on Showtime and the Discovery Channel and nationwide at colleges, prides, fundraisers and even the occasional livestock auction. Kelli is the health columnist for Curve Magazine online and a frequent contributor to XOJane. Her work has appeared on Refinery29, the New Republic online, Thought Catalog, Autostraddle and the Lambda Literary Foundation website. Kelli’s three comedy CDs: “I am NOT a 12 Year Old Boy” “Almost Pretty,” and “Why Is the Fat One Always Angry” are all on regular rotation on Sirius/XM Satellite Radio’s Rawdog Comedy Station and Pandora’s Margaret Cho Station.

YOU CAN BOOK KELLI DUNHAM!

Kelli likes to talk about humor, health, storytelling, LGBT life and gender, sometimes all at the same time. Check out her extensive list of presentations, performances and workshops at kellidunham.com and book her for your next event!



Freak of Nurture

stories and essays by Kelli Dunham

In *Freak of Nurture*, Dunham demonstrates that hilarity and chaos reign when you combine what her therapist calls “deep biological optimism” with a hearty midwestern work ethic and determination to make bad ideas a fantastic reality.

Whether she is writing about hitch-hiking across Haiti to help out with disaster relief or living on a houseboat in Philadelphia in the winter, Kelli Dunham’s humorous interpretation of difficult situations is both inspiring and entertaining.

\$14.95

Available at TopsidePress.com and wherever awesome books are sold.

F*CK YOUR HEALTH

Little Profane Guides to Taking Care of Our Queer Bodies

Volume I: Hey, Let’s Get A Pap Exam!

by Kelli Dunham

INTRODUCTION

FROM THE BIG QUEER NURSE COMIC WHO PENNED THIS LITTLE PROFANE ZINE:

Hey, I'm Kelli Dunham and I'm a nurse, and a comic and a slightly awkward genderqueer butchy type of person. I care a lot about queer health. I've watched people I love die of cancer and HIV/AIDS (yup, people still die) and other treatable/preventable medical conditions and it makes me sad and it makes me angry and because I'm your typical queer, that makes me want to have a project. This zine series is my project. Any money I make from these zines goes back into me being able to do teaching and trainings about queer health to places that can't pay me.

This is a work in progress and although all the information in here was accurate when I wrote it, not all of it will apply to you. My lawyer would probably tell me to add this disclaimer, something like this is health information of a general nature and cannot substitute for the advice of a medical professional. Nothing in here should be construed as an attempt to offer or render a medical opinion or otherwise engage in the practice of medicine.

But my lawyer is kind of an anarchist, so maybe not.

Note: I'm using gender neutral terms within this zine and also I am using the term "frontal opening" mostly, or occasionally the V-word to mean the V-Word. This is because some folks have a really hard time with the V-word. Hopefully you get what I'm talking about when I say "frontal opening" and "V-word." If not, turn to the person next to you and ask. But probably not if you're on a public bus.

P.S. If you've got an advice on how to make this zine better (and you're a bunch of queers, so I know you will), email me at kellidunham@gmail.com and I will see what I can do.

P.S.S. I know not all queer people who need pap exams have a hard time getting them. If that's the case for you YAY! Feel free to please pass this zine along to someone who might need it as well. Or put this one on your group house fridge because "FUCK YOUR HEALTH" is a cool thing to have on your group house fridge. And then buy another one (through kellidunham.com) for a friend.

BIG HUGE THANKS TO Tom Léger of Topside Press for layout assistance, and editorial advisement. The mistakes are all mine though.

THE “WHAT I NEED TO GET THROUGH THIS DAMNIT” WORKSHEET

I think I might need/want:

- Essential oil to smell
- Rescue Remedy or other natural calm-down substance
- Benzos (need to talk with provider)
- Music
- Guided visualization
- Meditation

I want the provider to (check as many as apply):

- guide me through every bit of the exam
- not talk at all, just get it over with quickly
- stop if I cry or look really upset
- power through if I cry or look really upset

Here is something my provider should know about my gender:

I would like to provider to use the following words for my bits

And I also might like to try:

- Sitting up for the exam
- Inserting the speculum myself
- Using a mirror during the exam so I can see my cervix
- Wearing my own clothes
- Establishing a safeword

need a break. Yellow for “hold on a minute, buster, this isn’t working for me” and “red” for “Holy shit I am not kidding, every FUCKING THING stops RIGHT NOW.”

In case of a total communication breakdown (VERY VERY unlikely, but it’s good to be prepared) there are two magical words all patients should know: I REFUSE.

Say it with me now

I REFUSE

I REFUSE

I REFUSE

We were taught in nursing school that if the patient says “I refuse” and the provider keeps going, it’s considered assault.

Again, YOU PROBABLY WON’T NEED THIS but it’s a good tool to have in your Pap Exam Hero toolbox, just in case.

FINALLY GIVE IT THE OL’ COLLEGE TRY BUT...

You don’t have to finish. Obligation should never be a factor in health care decisions.

You can take more than one appointment to get through a pap exam. You can take more than five appointments to get through a pap exam. Just keep troubleshooting and trying again.

Regardless of the outcome, you can celebrate because you

SHOWED

THE

FUCK

UP

FOR

YOURSELF.

STAYING GROUNDED DURING A PAP EXAM

In certain cases, you might not be able to avoid being triggered by an exam, but you can take steps to stay grounded. You’re the expert on your own life and your own trauma, so you may well know what works best for you. Some folks have tried:

Holding a friend’s hand or a solid object.

Bringing a snack to eat after the exam

If the smells (such as disinfectant, hand sanitizer, etc) of the exam are part of the difficulty, you can bring in a small bottle of essential oil into the exam room. Dab a little bit under your nose or even sniff it directly if that works. Citrus oils are a good choice because they can overpower almost everything but patchouli.

If you’re seeing a therapist or another mental health professional, you can work with them before the exam on specific grounding techniques and/or identifying what stimuli is triggering to you.

DO I NEED A PAP EXAM?

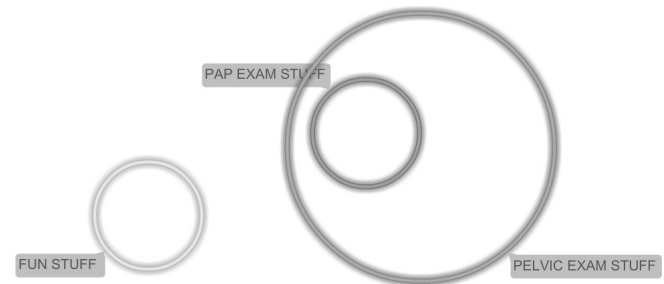
Uh well, if you have a cervix, yup, you need a pap exam regularly. Usually every one to three years. How often depends on your age and certain risk factors, like exposure to HPV.

It can get confusing because recently the American College of Physicians came out with a recommendation saying “hey folks who aren’t having symptoms don’t need pelvic exams anymore.” A pap exam is a small part of a pelvic exam which is what most folks understand to be the “feet in the stirrups experience”

During a pelvic exam, the provider looks at the outside bits, examines the frontal opening using a speculum, and then inserts two gloved fingers in the frontal opening while pressing down on the patient’s abdomen.

The pap exam is a procedure is done during the middle part of the pelvic exam while the speculum is inserted; it involves the removal of some cells from the cervix. The pap exam is looking for early changes in these cells that might indicate cancer or a precancerous condition.

Got it? Using a Venn diagram it looks like this:



Oh one more thing: even if you don’t have a cervix (either because you had the kind of hysterectomy in which your cervix was taken as well or because you have a surgically created V-word) you still need regular care. You’ll need to talk to your surgeon about how often and what. Sorry to be so vague, but there are lots of different factors and I don’t want to steer you wrong and I also I don’t want to ignore you like a transphobic jerk.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED, SOME IMPORTANT SHIT TO REMEMBER

People are always saying you have to love your body to take care of it.

This, my dear friends, is bullshit.

It’s a great goal sure, to love your body. But it ain’t always easy....

Especially if: you’ve been assaulted, raped, shamed for your body and/or having a frontal opening or maybe you have what other people consider a V-word, but that’s never the word you would use for it, or maybe you had have

your V-word surgically created because you weren't born with one.

Or maybe you just live under capitalism where every day we're told there is something really wrong with our bodies because making people dissatisfied with their own bodies is a great way to sell shit.

Having a difficult relationship with your body does not make you a bad

Feminist

Radical queer

Gender radical

Punk

Etc.

It makes you human.

But as for taking care of your body...

There are times I have lived in really crappy apartments. I lived in a place in Miami in the 90s where if you flushed the toilet, poo came up through the shower drain. In my first Brooklyn apartment, you had to wear a hat in the living room to keep the falling cockroaches from getting in your hair. I didn't love those apartments, let me tell you. But I loved that I had somewhere to live, so I did my very best to take care of them.

Same thing with my body.

I'm a masculine looking chick/ genderqueer person with absolutely huge boobs; I have the shoulders of a linebacker and the chest of Dolly Parton. I don't look at my tits in the mirror and say "damn, those are some mighty fine huge ass floppy ass tits." But I still go for regular mammograms because I don't want to die from anything that could be treatable if caught early.

Think about it, if you don't care of your body where are you going to live your big queer life?

What will you use to go to that protest?

What will you fuck with?

Loving our bodies? That's a great goal, but that's not possible for some of us.

You don't have to love your body to take care of it.

You're allowed to feel ambivalent, just take one little tiny baby step towards getting care.

THE SECOND BIG IMPORTANT HUGE THING TO REMEMBER

You deserve healthcare.

It's important to remember this because (and I bet you already know this) the system is not set up to provide care. The health care system is about money (primarily) and then provider convenience. If you're in there, anywhere, it's kinda last place

That's why you need to --if possible-- believe you deserve health care so you can get through the difficulty of getting it.

It doesn't matter what kind of care you've taken, or not taken of your body..

YOU DESERVE HEALTHCARE

Say it to yourself.

When they call you back, you might need to say it again.

If they look confused, keep repeating that statement. Whatever excuse they give you about why that's not possible? Just keeping saying the same words:

I'd like to talk with the provider before the exam. With all my clothes on.

I'd like to talk with the provider before the exam. With all my clothes on.

I'd like to talk with the provider before the exam. With all my clothes on.

I'd like to talk with the provider before the exam. With all my clothes on.

If it feels weird to say the same thing over and over, try every other time with an English accent. But just keeping say the same thing, and I can almost guarantee you, 90 percent of the time they'll just give in.

Where else but a play party are you expected to meet someone for the first time when you're mostly naked? Expecting it in a healthcare office is just weird.

PRO TIP

Don't be afraid to practice saying these phrases at home before the exam. Hopefully at a time when you're mostly alone. Or incorporate one of your aspiring actor buddies. You've run lines for them before, right?

WHEN YOU TALK WITH THE PROVIDER

Explain why the pap exam is difficult for (in general; you don't need to go into specifics unless you want to share them) or explain, without explanation "this exam is hard for me."

Provide your own personalized list of What I Need To Get Through This Dammit. (see the worksheet at the end of this zine). For example, some folks want to:

- Know everything that is going to happen, before it happens and have the whole process narrated step by step
- Have the provider refrain from talking and not give any explanations in order to quickly get it over with
- Have the exam while in a less prone position (that is almost sitting up)
- Use a mirror during the exam to see their own cervix. I know, hella '70s, but really helps some folks! Who knows, maybe your cervix is super cute and you might WANT to see it.
- Have the provider use a pediatric speculum
- Talk with the provider about what words they can and can't use to in reference to your bits.
- Be able to insert the speculum rather than having the provider do it
- Wear something other than the standard issue ass-showing, everything-showing paper gown. For a pap exam, the provider only needs access to one very small area of your body. There is no reason to strip off your lucky transsexual menace tee shirt or your black hoodie or lace camisole or whatever makes you feel good about life and yourself.
- Establish a safe word you can use with the provider if at any time you

in the morning when the provider is less likely to be running behind or they might be able to make sure your appointment is using two appointment slots.

- If you're afraid you're going to get misgendered on the phone and that's going to cause a shame slide, make one of your friends do the talking for you. Really. As favors go, it's not that big of a deal.
- If you think that you might be triggered and/or have a difficult time with the exam, try to schedule it on a day when you're not likely to be super stressed about anything else, and at a time when you can do whatever you need to get yourself grounded afterwards. Set yourself up for success: if you know Thursday mornings your boss is always up your ass for I dunno, not putting new coversheets on the TPS reports before they go out, don't schedule your pap at noon on Thursday.

PREPPING FOR THE APPOINTMENT

How ya doing there Pap Exam Hero? Feeling good? Yes? No? Feeling proud and scared? Worried and happy? Nervous and Nauseous? All those feelings are legitimate and lots of people before you have felt them too.

Some things other PEHs have done in order to prep for their pap exam include:

- Plan to bring someone with you to the appointment. This doesn't need to be your closest pal and definitely doesn't need to be your boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/spouse/primary partner/secondary partner/tertiary partner/Top/boi. Choose someone who knows how to speak up for others in a medical situation and can be a calming force while still being a fierce advocate. You've got a bossy friend, right? They might just be very best person to bring along, as long as they know when to back the hell up off of bossing you.
- Do you need to pre-medicate? If pap exams feel fully out of your emotional reach (because you've found them too overwhelming or triggering) you can ask for some pharmaceutical help to get through it, in the form a short-acting benzodiazepine; your provider can write you a script for just a pill or two. If you're clean/sober, you'll have to make your own decision about whether benzos are a good choice. In addition some people say they feel less in control during an exam if they are medicated which for some people is triggering too.

If you think this might be true, there are non-pharm calming alternatives as well:

- Rescue Remedy (people swear by RR; people even use it by their cats!)
- Music
- Deep Breathing
- Visualization
- Meditation

AT THE PROVIDER'S OFFICE

When you go to check in at the front desk, explain that you'd like to talk with the provider before the exam, when you have all your clothes on. They will hopefully relay this back to whoever is doing the room assignments.

I DESERVE HEALTHCARE
I DESERVE HEALTHCARE
I DESERVE HEALTHCARE
I DESERVE HEALTHCARE
I DESERVE HEALTHCARE

Still don't believe it? Call a friend and ask them to say it to you.

Or call me. My cell is 215.974.1963. I'll totally tell you that you totally deserve healthcare.

HOW TO FIND A PROVIDER

If you already have a provider, you can skip this part. You don't have to skip this part though, I'm not telling you how to run your life. Well a little I am, but just about the pap exam part.

FINDING A PROVIDER STEP #1

Did you know if you have a primary care provider, you might already have a provider who can do a pap exam?

Yup, lots of primary care providers offer that service. Let's talk pros and cons

Pros

- You already know your provider and may have a good relationship with them
- You know how the office works and whether they are going to be weird about your gender, gender presentation, 30 person polyamorous family situation, etc.
- You don't have to sit in a gyn office that is painted pink, has frilly curtains and is full of women, which can be uncomfortable sometimes if you don't like frilly curtains and even more so if you're not a woman. Especially if everyone's staring at you like "whoa, who let short grizzly adams in here."

Cons

- Maybe you can't deal with seeing a provider for strep throat after they've been all up close and personal with your bits
- Maybe they don't do enough pap exams to get comfortable with the pap exam (they should be doing at least a few each week to maintain skills, it's cool to ask)

Note about paps with your primary: You can't usually get one on the same day you come in with another problem, because you're only slotted for a few minutes with a sick visit. But you can schedule your exam while you're dealing with that roller derby injury and then you've got in on your calendar.

Or you can go call your primary right now. Go on. I'll wait.

FINDING A PROVIDER STEP #2: ASKING AROUND

Getting a recommendation is a great way to find a provider who can meet your needs.

Ask, ask, ask. Your friends, your family (well...depending), ask your other providers

Talk to someone with a similar gender situation as you

Talk to someone you work with (if you're up for that convo over 9 am coffee) since they likely to have the same insurance

Word of mouth referral is your best bet because you know at least one person had a good experience with that provider. That's a start, right?

If you're living in an isolated area, hit up the local gay bar and ask the bartender. Or if you're isolated and in recovery, hit up the local Metropolitan Community Church. They are usually pretty chill about not making you, you know, actually pray or anything, and often there are MCCs when there's nothing else queer for miles and miles around.

FINDING A PROVIDER STEP #3: CONSULT THE INTERWEBZ (or whatever kids are calling it these days)

The Gay & Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA): Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality keeps a list of LGBT friendly providers on their website (glma.org). Included on this list are our designated LGBT health centers which exist in some of our larger cities (eg Callen-Lorde in New York and Fenway in Boston) which might be a viable option for you.

Looking for a list of providers who have signed a Health at Every Size Pledge?

You can find that here: www.haesccommunity.org.

Nursing Centers, where all the care is provided by (um. bet you already guessed this) both RNs and advanced care nurses, can be an excellent choice because they're often able to spend more time with their patients than other health centers. The National Nursing Centers Consortium maintains a list on their website: www.nncc.us

If you're uninsured you can often get care at a Federally Qualified Health Center. FQHCs get federal cash and are required to have a sliding scale. There is a national database of these centers here: http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/Search_HCC.aspx

Finally, don't forget about Planned Parenthood! Despite the name they do much more than help folks plan for parenthood (or trying not to achieve accidental parenthood). The services they offer varies from area or area but it's worth calling your local PP to see if they have a sliding scale for what you need.

UNINSURED?

You know there are navigators that will help walk you through the Affordable Care Act and how to get signed up right? Check out healthcare.gov and search for an ACA Navigator in your area

FINDING A PROVIDER STEP #4: CHECK 'EM OUT

You can ask for a consult at the provider's office to see if you can be comfortable not only with the provider but also the office environment.

Some factors to consider when meeting the provider:

Overall chill-ness. Does the provider seem open, can they make eye contact with you without squirming or do they persist on staring at your chest/crotch/tattoos/ piercings? Are they able to answer your questions?

Access: Can you reach the provider? How? By text, telephone, voicemail, etc. Do you know how to reach the on-call person if your provider is not available?

Queer-friendliness: Does the intake form ask for information about your partner or family rather than just your spouse? Does the provider seem knowledgeable about actual issues of queer health?

Gender-friendliness: Is there a place for preferred pronoun on the intake sheet in your chart? Does the provider ask you what name you go by and/or is there a place for that in the chart? Does the provider follow your lead about what you call your bits? Are any questions about your gender actually related to your care rather than curiosity?

Overall office environment: Is there any overt sign that they're trying to be LGBT-friendly. For example, if they've painted the outside of the building in a rainbow and they have huge signed photos of K.D. Lang in the waiting room you might question their taste but you would understand they were trying to make our people feel comfortable.

Is the waiting room full of people who look like they've been waiting a very long time? Are the plants alive or are they dried up and covered in dust? Myself I'm an urban queer and have no love or trust of nature, but if the staff can't keep a cactus alive, you might reconsider their care skills.

Boundaries: Is there so much overlap with your queer social circles that the person who does your pap exam might show up at your next bigqueer house party because they're dating your ex? If so, are you cool with that?

YOU'VE GOT A PROVIDER, NOW WHAT?

Okay pap exam heroes, you've got a provider, the next step is to MAKE THE APPOINTMENT.

MAKING THE APPOINTMENT

Making the appointment is pretty basic right? But some stuff to think about:

- If you know you might need a little extra time, mention that to the scheduler. They might be able to slot you in a less busy time, first thing