



I'm going to tell you something, and you're going to judge me. I've never been tested for any STIs.

Most of my life I've been in long term relationships, and when I've not been in said relationships, I don't tend to sleep with lots of people. My thinking was that because of these things, the chances of me having anything would be slim to say the least.

I can hear the intakes of breath and the silent shaking of heads. I know, I know.

Anyhow, I realised the blindingly obvious fact that even if you've only been with a few people, you don't know their histories, and it only takes one person, with something, to pass it on to you.

And that's why I decided to get checked out.

Sexual Health Clinics are pretty much like every clinic I've ever been to. Looking around there are a few people, mostly looking fairly anxious, sitting on chairs.

I have to fill in a form, and I'm immediately on guard, because forms and trans people often do not mix well. Luckily, it's relatively friendly, in that it has pronoun boxes, and a box to tick if you choose to identify as trans. It does still assume all male identifying people have penises and all female identifying people have vaginas though, which despite what you may have been told, just isn't true. Gender, as is increasingly being discovered, is more complex than genitals.

I get called by a nurse to come to a room, and it's a man. I ticked a box saying I didn't mind who saw me, but now I feel like I do mind. Suddenly I feel that how he potentially sees me is under threat, as he'll ask what bits I've got, and I feel uncomfortable about telling him, because he's a man, and my experiences of men are nearly always negative.

I don't know what to do, because if I say I'm not comfortable after all its going to be really awkward, and I don't want to seem mean. Also though I've been waiting for an hour now, and I can't stand to wait any longer with all the other people wondering if this was really such a good idea, and the local radio station with its endless adverts for driving schools and zero percent loans.

In the end I do what most people would do, I go along with it. The commercial radio was the clincher if I'm honest.

We go to a room, and I start saying how I'm actually kind of nervous, and that I didn't bring a friend, because I thought it would make for something good to write about if it was just me, but that now I regret that because I didn't think it through, and how that is pretty standard for me.

He smiles and says it's alright, everyone is a little nervous sometimes. He is reassuring and kind, and I feel like I let my preconceptions and past experiences get the better of me. Not for the first time I also think I'm a judgemental jerk.

He does ask me what bits I've got, but he does it in a way that's so matter of fact, yet sensitive, that it's okay.

He then asks me if I'd like to piss in a jar.

I'm very keen on this offer, as I'd been holding it in for about two hours now. He also took some blood, and did a throat swab, because well, you know, oral?

We chat whilst this is all happening, and he tells me about how Syphilis is one of the biggest STIs affecting the area where we live. I have an overwhelming desire to tell him about how everyone thinks Henry VIII had Syphilis, but that actually there's little evidence to prove this. I'm about to blurt it out in a oh my god I'm nervous so I'm going to say anything sort of way when he asks if I'd like a leaflet about it, and I forget all about Henry's STI issues, and instead say it's okay, I don't need one, even though I'm interested in reading about it. I do this because I'm trying to be polite, and don't want to put him out.

He gives me two Syphilis leaflets anyhow. This guy is good.



Models have been used to protect the story-teller's anonymity

He asks me about the last couple of times I'd been with someone, and I tell him about the French woman I slept with once, and the friend I was with for a bit. For some reason I feel the need to go into detail about both these times. I have no idea why, but he seems to be happy to listen, and offer useful commentary on what I tell him.

It strikes me that I really misjudged him, and I did it entirely based on his gender. When people do that to me it really upsets me, and once again I feel like a jerk.

After all the tests are done we start to wrap things up. He tells me they'll ring me if anything shows up, and text if it's all clear. I get up to go, and I want to give him a hug to say how lovely he'd been. In the end he gave me a double hand shake, and I told him he was awesome and that I'd definitely come back for more check-ups if he did them. He laughs, and I realise I'm incapable of playing it cool in anyway whatsoever.

As I leave I think about how today I've learnt something about my own preconceptions, and also about Syphilis.

A week later, as I was sitting in a cafe, my phone buzzed. A text message from the clinic had come through with the all clear. I smile to myself, and think thought as much. Maybe I'll hang onto those leaflets though, just in case.