

We need to talk about 'top privilege'

Stop bottom shaming and placing tops on pedestals, says Rembrandt Duran



Pray for More Tops' T-shirt
by Darkroomcollection.com (Photo: Andres Santana @thesan_edin for Darkroom)

There has been a long time understanding between 'The Gays' (the male gay community, that is) that we are divided into three main categories: top, bottom, and vers. There's also vers top or vers bottom, but we won't get into those specifics here.

Throughout history it's believed that we have coexisted, for the most part, in peace and harmony.

However, when you take a closer look, you'll start to see underlying issues that separate us and how sexual positions can affect our lives in very real and impactful ways.

Everything from [Fleeing](#) to poop shaming to HIV contraction rate, we start to see that we tops have a kind of privilege that our vers and bottom sisters do not have.

STI Risk

The risk of contracting HIV and other STIs is significantly lower for tops, according to the [Center for Disease Control](#) in the US [Editor's note: Risk varies greatly according to viral load, but the CDC gives an average of it being 13 times riskier for bottoms than tops.]

Not only that, but tops have the distinct luxury of being able to identify symptoms of certain STIs more quickly than bottoms, allowing them to seek out treatment right away. It might take a bottom a formal diagnosis to know something's wrong.

Trust

When a bottom isn't on PrEP (a HIV preventive drug), a certain amount of responsibility and trust is placed with the top to not do things like remove the condom mid-sex and to be alert to any potential breaks in the prophylactic. 'Stealthing' is when your partner removes their condom during intercourse without telling you, opting for their personal pleasure over your safety.



In my experience, this is a common practice within the gay community. Unfortunately, a bottom may not realize until after the fact.

Social privileges

Next I want to talk about the social benefits a top is afforded, which might not be as medically provable, but we absolutely do see evidence of it in our community.

While two tops or two bottoms can hook up with one another in several non-penetrative ways — and that's completely valid — the most common perception of sex is believed to be penetrative, and between a top and a bottom (you might flip positions midway, but you get what I mean).

Unfortunately, there are still many people who see bottoms' promiscuity as something more shameful, dirty, or 'slutty' than that of tops. There seems to be different reasons people 'bottom shame' and, truthfully, all of them are dumb as hell.

I've come across people who celebrate and cheer on my success on Grindr, and have even noticed that it makes me more desirable. Meanwhile, my bottom peers with a similar sexual resume get looked down upon for the same practices.

There is a false sentiment that bottoms who engage in high levels of sexual activity or with many partners, have 'loose holes' which is simply untrue. If you are having anal sex and taking your time, using lube, and making sure everything is done at a proper pace, the asshole will remain tight.

It's only when the anus gets damaged that it loses its elasticity, which is mostly caused by tops who have no idea what they're doing.

One of the most despicable ways I've seen this attitude expressed is tops using bottoms' STI contraction rates against them. Another is the old school way of looking at things we've unfortunately adopted from #TheStraights. This is that the 'catcher' is the weaker, more feminine one in the pairing.

This thought process comes from internalized homophobia and sexist attitudes towards penetration.

Some seem to feel like, 'Sure, I'm gay but at least I'm a top.' This belief stems from residual shame after coming out, and the notion that traditionally masculine expressions of sexuality are somehow more valid.

Luckily as I've gotten older and delved into more sexually liberated groups of gay people, I encounter less and less of this. But every now and then I'm reminded that there are plenty of people of all ages who still feel this way.

Paint shaming

Lastly, I'd like to speak on a topic that I believe isn't given enough attention within our community, and that's paint shaming.

For those of you who don't know what 'painting' in this context is, it's a slang term to describe when a bottom isn't fully cleaned out and a little something is left on the top's penis.

Now, I personally think bottoms are made to upheld completely ridiculous standards, not only dietary wise but also supplementary! I've seen threads upon threads of tweets and Facebook statuses about what bottoms can do to make sure they have pristine anuses for their tops.

Some people go to certain extremes as taking six fiber pills a day, using multiple Fleet enemas, and not eating for hours prior to a hookup. And while this humble top is no nutritionist, I can't imagine that's healthy.

'Collateral damage'

I understand that most bottoms do this to feel less worried, more prepared, and cleaner, but as tops we have to stop demanding such perfection from bottoms.

We must be more understanding if something goes wrong, and recognize how much labor and time bottoms put into their bodies (specifically their buttholes).

They may say they do it for themselves, but we tops reap the fruits of their efforts either way, and we do not appreciate it enough.

I have heard stories of tops kicking bottoms out after being painted, making a big deal about it, and causing further embarrassment to the bottom. It's just not right. Tops should know what they sign up for, and if we can't handle a little collateral damage we shouldn't be playing the game to begin with.

Listen, shit happens, and if we don't start accepting that, and stop demanding perfection then I smell a bottom revolution in the near future. Watch them all stop douching because we couldn't appreciate what we had. We need to cherish our bottoms for all that they put up with and do for us.

Let's recognize our top privilege and try and do better by them. It's about time we checked ourselves.

A version of this column first appeared on Killer and a Sweet Thang. Follow Rembrandt Duran on Twitter and Instagram.

*Main image: Model: Paul McNulty (@dppjm1).
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