All men are liars

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'The wryly delivered insult is more often than not a marker of endearment rather than contempt.'

"Hello, torturer of Jesus," I say to my very close Jewish friend when he answers the phone.  
  
"Oh, and didn't he sob like a little baby girl up on that cross, eh?" he'll respond.  
  
It doesn't matter that both of these statements are historically inaccurate, it's the insult that counts because we're mates and that's what (my) mates do.  
  
"Ah, my sweaty, little ham-breathed friend," he'll continue, "how is your accursed Gentile life going?"  
  
Further insults from me will be countered with a speech about my general uncleanliness, how my loathsome tribe might aspire to the purity of the Chosen but writhe instead in our goyim world of filth and stench.  
  
And so it goes, neither of us the slightest bit offended, increasingly amused the more outrageously disrespectful we can be.  
  
Then again, we are very close. He'd probably be the best person to do the eulogy at my funeral if I died tomorrow.  
  
One of the great quirks of friendship is you know you're on solid ground with someone when you can finally start hanging crap on them.  
  
It might be I have unusually abusive friendships but over the years I've noticed it with enough strangers and their buddies – that the wryly delivered insult is more often than not a marker of endearment rather than contempt.  
  
There's certainly an art to it.  
  
For example, my above-mentioned friend also has hundreds of tiny, oily, black hairs sprouting from the blackheads in his nose, but I'd never mention them because I know he's sensitive about it.  
  
His bizarre sex life, ballooning weight and limited vocabulary are all fair game, however.  
  
Likewise, he won't tease me about the fact I have the supraorbital ridge of a Neolithic cave dweller because he knows I'm touchy about my protruding chimp-forehead.  
  
So, while it might sound like we're both insensitive dickheads, we're actually playing a subtle game of "I love you" because we trust each other not to go there.  
  
I know when I reach this stage of familiarity with new friends – when I can tell them they look like a wet goat from behind as they lurch out of the surf in their Speedos – it's as if I can finally take a full breath; the stone of propriety has been lifted from my chest.  
  
This is also, strangely, the time many men feel comfortable making homosexual jibes about their friends, the unspoken sentiment being "Hey, we like each other ... but not that much, er ... Right?"  
  
When I was 18, I lived with my older brother and his mate, and it's fair to say for the first few months I was treated as a nuisance.  
  
After a break-up with my first serious girlfriend, I was particularly moody and got a phone call one morning at our gorgeously putrid flat. On the other end was a guy blubbering and sobbing.  
  
"Who is this?" I demanded.  
  
The voice, which I now recognised as one of my brother's friends, screamed: "IT'S YOOOOU."  
  
This was the sound of acceptance.