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views: A Toast to Homophobia

Two guys are watching a football game. One of them hands the other a beer. Their hands accidentally touch and there's a slight but perceptible moment between them. Suddenly they both jump explosively to opposite sides of the couch and talk nervously about their team and whether the coach got the defensive kinks worked out. After an awkward pause, one guy says, "You know what this game needs? More cheerleaders."

The Heineken beer commercial is genuinely funny. It's on a unique Web site called The Commercial Closet (www.commercial-closet.org), which has a collection of over 200 gay-themed commercials. Inventive and imaginative, the site tracks America's changing views of homosexuality through the lens of Madison Avenue's video cameras.

I'm still conditioned by how society expects me to react when two men express desire for each other.

I was still laughing when I read the site's condemnation of the ad and suddenly I felt this gash of guilt rip through me. Why was I laughing at a commercial that ridiculed the most fundamental aspect of my being—my attraction to other men?

I'm Jewish. If I had seen a beer commercial ridiculing synagogues would I have laughed? No.

I'm Latino. If I had seen a beer commercial ridiculing brown skin would I have laughed? No.

But I'm gay and I laughed at the ridicule heaped on male love.

Being gay is a much

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more fundamental aspect of my being than my religion (my mother is Jewish, my father Catholic. My true religion is Guilt). It's also more fundamental than my ethnicity (my mother's American, my father is Ecuadorian. My true ethnicity is Confused).

I am only partially Jewish and partially Latino, but I am all gay.

And yet I laughed.

Every time I think I'm as comfortable as I can be about my orientation something like this happens to remind me that maybe there's a little more internal

being out, pulled my own fear and shame out by the roots. Perhaps all I've done is mowed them down to nubs. I'm still conditioned by how society expects me to react when two men express desire for each other.

The Commercial Closet was built as a creative way to gauge the country's changing views of a sexual minority. But it turns out to have an even more valuable function than simply as a sociological device to measure society's tolerance of the different.

It's also a device that measures your own comfort level at who you are. Do you buy the assumptions of the commercials? Do you agree with their premises? Do you like the way you're being portrayed in thirty-second mini-movies seen by tens of millions of people?

I've gone back and watched the Heineken spot again. I still laugh at it, but thanks to the site's review of it, I came at it with a higher level of awareness. Yes, the commercial is funny, but its message is not.

While separation, denial and suppression is an accurate portrayal of how men behave when they're confronted with the "de-masculinization" of love and tenderness, the spot could have redeemed itself by ending with the guys getting together. That way it could have accurately portrayed the fear and revulsion of unwanted feelings and shown that there's nothing wrong with love between men.

It's interesting how a device that measures society's views turns out to be a diagnostic measurement for self-acceptance. Going through the site's TV commercials and print ads, you can't help but get a deeper sense of who you are and how much work you still may have in front of you to completely accept yourself. ■

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I still have not, after years of