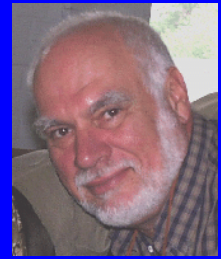


## TESTOSTERONE POISONING

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As an expatriate spending much of my time working in Europe, I am dependent on email as my life-link with friends and colleagues in the USA. Those of us with email, of course, have been struggling with spam for the better part of this year. Mostly, I would just like to trash it without looking at it. However, spam filters being imperfect, I am forced to review the senders and the subject lines to make sure I don't through away something personal or something valuable.

It's getting to me. Over here it looks like the US is having an impotence problem. As far as I can tell, ads for Viagra and longer penises have now far outstripped any other form of advertising in our history, due to their sheer quantity. I get 50 to 60 a day. A friend sent me an animated cartoon of George Bush answering one of these "want a longer penis" spam, sent by a certain Tanya. When he inquired about how to get one, the answer came back, "Attach Iraq!" In the final frame of the cartoon, Osama Bin Laden was revealed as the person posing as Tanya at the computer at the other end.

This may not be far off the mark. Now that the US occupational security seems faltering, the urgency to "push" macho solutions on the scene and impose them on the UN seems to be the desperate strategy. One of the effects of "testosterone poisoning," as a psychologist friend of mine used to call the need to always look and act macho, is that the victim needs to look self-sufficient no matter what it costs, and he doesn't know how to ask for help.

I have often wondered if the fact that USians don't have other sources of identity that really count (regional, familial, etc.) makes it imperative that we erect something or do something in order to be someone. "Who are you?" is not a question we ask in the US when we meet new people. Rather, it is the answer to, "What do you do?" that gives us substance and title to life. Pity those who don't do don't have an identity from what they do. They are low on the salvation chain of the US civic religion.

Penis power seems to be integral to the national identity now, with women pictured as desiring it as much as men. Where is this monomaniacal need coming from? One of the things that I learned in years of working with men's groups is that insecurity over one's masculinity rather than solid masculinity is the source of extreme competition and violence among men. Once men adopt their fathers and forgive them as well as forgiving themselves for "dissing" their fathers, the gentle, creative, caring, and nurturing side of masculinity can come out of hiding. If I no longer have to prove that I am male, I can act like a man. Keeping men insecure about performance, however, provides a reliable source of belligerence for political purposes and stocks the military with rocket-launcher fodder.

Unfortunately, mature masculinity is dearly lacking from public life. Perhaps given the obligatory patriotic zeitgeist, those in politics who might be suspected of having or developing it seem compelled to hide it. Given the fact that we are coming up on primaries for next year's presidential election, the Democrats are forced to look, not so much for a platform, but for a

candidate who can actually be elected. This candidate must be a tall flagpole that men will vote for. Yes, that is correct, that MEN will vote for. It is in this light that Wesley Clark is being drafted as the undeniably male, ex-military answer. Certainly a general has got to have *cojones*. Clark may indeed prove a good bet for the Dems, but it would be more heartening if the search were motivated by the desire to get away from the usual suspects, the lawyers with business connections as candidates. But, in fact, the hunt is on for marketable testosterone.

Another indicator of the national hard-on has been flagged by Nina Bernstein, of the *New York Times*. In her September 28 article, "For Americans It's French Sissies vs. German He-Men," she resolved the weird paradox that we have been sensing lately. Both France and Germany have taken essentially the same resistant stance vis-à-vis US foreign policy and US initiatives or lack of them in the UN Security Council. Yet, it is plain for all to see that France gets our full and continuous rancor, while Germany is treated with mild demurral if there is any response at all. (Bernstein's article is archived at:

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F40612F838590C7B8EDDA00894DB404482>)

Bernstein insists that this paradox results from the fact that France is seen and treated as a *woman* while Germany is seen and treated as a *man*. An analysis of the language used toward both by the US administration and toady journalists confirms this. Even Colin Powell spoke about his French counterpart as having a fit of "the vapors," that is, on his "monthlies." We are all familiar with the military tradition of picturing the enemy as women or "pussies" in order to boast our male courage and to dispatch them.

So women, you are the real enemies of insecure masculinity after all... Floods of testosterone poisoning peak when men are least confident about themselves and need somehow to prove their existence and their maleness by pulling out a larger cannon. Male inflation means regression to roles in which men protect rather than partner with women. "Dick head," male hubris, whether political, domestic, or occupational leads to isolation, desperation, and ultimately to the destruction of the deep potential of men as fathers, lovers, mentors, friends, teachers, and political beings. Men march to their own destruction if the only beat they ever hear is in four-quarter time. Lysistrata, arise!